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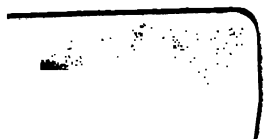
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THE HOME AND THE PRIEST.

AN ITALIAN TALE.

BY GIROLAMO VOLPE,

AUTHOR OF

"MEMOIRS OF AN EX-CAPUCHIN; OR, SCENES OF
MONASTIC LIFE IN ITALY." "LA TRADITA DEGLI AMIDEI,"
&c., &c. —

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :
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1860.

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DEDICATION.

TO THORNTON HUNT, ESQ.

MY DEAR HUNT,

The English translation, by an able English pen, from the unpublished Italian original, of my work, with which you are already acquainted from having kindly undertaken its very careful revision, is on the eve of publication. I beg permission to dedicate it to you, the more readily, since in thus dedicating it, I am afforded the opportunity of recording a circumstance which redounds to the honour of your distinguished father, Leigh Hunt, and to the whole of the work itself. You know that a few weeks before he finished his mortal career, he was requested by me to give an opinion upon the work, and that he not only consented to read it, but, unsolicited, he completed a life of courtesy by a new and conspicuous instance of kindness. Failing as he was in health, he spontaneously applied himself to revise the English of the book, and pursued the task until the end of the second volume, and desisted alone when the state of his health rendered him unable to proceed. In fact, it was but a few days after he had been thus arrested in the work, that you were mourning his loss.

In noting this peculiar kindness, I beg leave to quote from two letters which your father addressed to me, and which you have seen, passages relating to the book itself:—

" July 23rd.

" Your second volume, with the exception of a chapter here and there, seems to require less revision than the first. I am just finishing the conversation between the priest and the chaplain; am more and more interested in the story; and was particularly struck with the manifestation of the latter's fury over the dead body of the Marchioness. His propensity to give it a blow was, to me, a new, and is certainly an appalling example of the terrible."

" August 3rd.

" I think the work interesting; its exhibitions, in particular of some of the passions, masterly; and I am also of opinion that all which is related of Italian manners and customs, and of the vices and machinations of the priesthood, would be extremely welcome to my countrymen in general."

He did not see the third volume, but you, who know how the action is increased, and how the argument is extended to the political, as well as religious aspect of the question, will not greatly differ from my impression, that, had Leigh Hunt completed the perusal of the work, he would rather have confirmed than have abated that opinion.

I hold these circumstances to be the more fully recorded here, not only because they tell in favour of the work itself, but because I am thus enabled to acknowledge the help which I have received from the son, by doing honour to the memory of the father who practised the most refined courtesy to the latest day of his life.

Believe me to be,

My dear HUNT,

Very sincerely yours,

GIROLAMO VOLPE.

27, Weymouth Street,
Portland Place.

23rd November, 1859.

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THE HOME AND THE PRIEST.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCENE OPENS.

AN infinite succession of mountains, presenting the most marvellous variety of aspect and contour, characterises the province of Lunaco, one of the most picturesque in Italy. The traveller loses much who pursues his course without stopping to examine the features of the country. All the elements of beauty are there combined; mountains of every height, and every degree of productiveness, from the sterile naked rock to the vine-bearing slope, attesting the bounteousness of nature. Ample tracts of plain, inter-

sected by rivers and streams, are bordered by hills which here and there rise like observatories. Beautiful valleys, rich in grateful shade, pictures of cultivated fields, which, if not very fertile, offer the choicest specimens of nature's gifts ; meadows of beautiful green, studded with a thousand varieties of flowers. Now, as by enchantment, an elysium springs to view, so joyfully does nature smile in her beauty ; now terror-striking solitudes, where nature exhibits herself in wild and awful magnificence. Here lakes and reservoirs of purest water, there cascades dashing forth their torrents.

At the utmost wildness, where expectation prepares with a shudder to enter upon a more awful scene, lo ! before the eye opens an ample valley, presenting every possible charm. These varied beauties, combined so marvellously together, are all enhanced by the purity and salubrity of the air, which causes vigour and buoyancy, and fills the traveller with the sense of enjoyment in mere physical existence.

In this charming spot the inhabitants are no less deserving of notice than the scenery. Everywhere courtesy in various forms manifests itself.

Here it is shown in the refined manners of the city and high life, there in the simplicity of rustic frankness blended with lordly magnificence. Again, under the aspect of rough and uncouth Alpine manners, a tender heart and generous, benevolent disposition may be discerned. Hospitality is esteemed a sacred right, and looked upon as an hereditary duty. The intellect of the inhabitants is lively and acute, and their sentiments, lofty and animated, are warmed by their glowing sun. The tone of their minds is influenced and elevated by the stupendous variety of scene—magnificent mountains and gentle valleys—with which they are familiar, and their bearing is dignified and manly.

The principal town of the province boasts of having enjoyed a noble independence during the middle ages. More recently, though no longer entirely self-governed, but subject to Italian domination, it still maintained its own privileges and laws, until it fell under the stranger's yoke, as it remains at present. It can boast its warriors, its politicians, its literati, its artists; while its old noblesse, and its monuments, bespeak past municipal glories.

CHAPTER II.

THE MESSAGE.

IN the parlour of a nunnery, a few hundred yards distant from the town of Lunaco, a priest stands in conversation with the Abbess, who had been summoned to his presence at his request. The eye of the priest is of intense depth; upon his well-developed and thoughtful brow, apparently the seat of high intelligence, a shade may be distinguished, betraying anxiety and discontent. The features are regular, and moulded in a form of masculine beauty; the complexion is of a bronze-like darkness; the expression, powerful rather than amiable, has in it, to an acute eye, something even of the sinister. His smile is, however, still most winning, although in the

delicately chiselled lips a malicious curve may be, remarked, involuntarily suggesting the idea of a mind perverse, or easily perverted—his stature above the middle height; his frame slight and agile, but well-developed and gracefully moulded beneath his cassock. Though clad with strictest regularity in priestly guise, his appearance is marked by an air of studied neatness and elegance, as if, while wearing the cassock, he still makes pretensions to please. He is now at the age of life's greatest vigour, scarcely yet twenty-eight.

The Abbess was a woman of middle age; of exquisite manners, rather social than monastic, though prudent and reserved in conversation. She once knew the world, had many admirers in it, and received the homage paid to dignified and severe virtue. While still young and fair, though past the bloom of youth, she became a nun. Her acquaintance marvelled; the town was in amaze; and murmurs circulated of an unfortunate attachment. The tales might be true or not; but her fair fame was beyond the reach of censure. She had led a retired and reserved life, but her grave demeanour, presenting outwardly, we may say, an almost impenetrable


impassibility, might have been the mask which hid an impassioned soul.

With her dignified manners, her knowledge of the world, and her gentle seriousness, she soon obtained the ascendancy over the simple nuns, and was quickly created Abbess. She was entirely devoted to the welfare of the convent, which chiefly consisted in winning to become its inmates as many young ladies of high family as possible, with the consequent advantages of a rich dowry. Instead of resorting, however, to the usual methods of seduction, in order to induce the boarders to join the sisterhood, she adroitly seconded the slightest tendency to that effect. She cherished the hope of gaining for a nun, among others of noble birth, the Lady Amalia Fossombroni, a great prize for the convent; and a still greater prize for herself, to have always at her side the maiden whom she loved with a motherly affection.

After mutual salutations, the Abbess observed, in a soft, gentle tone—"You requested to see me, Don Giuseppe; may I beg to be informed of your wishes?"

"I am here, reverend Mother, by order of the

Marchioness of Fossombroni, to make a communication to you. The Marchioness, this morning, summoned me hastily, and said to me, 'I am growing so feeble, Don Giuseppe, I know that my days are numbered, and I feel greatly the want of my Amalia, whose smile may warm my heart, as its pulsations are ready to cease, and whose hand may close my eyes.' I assure you, Mother, that my eyes filled with tears. I restrained my feelings, however, and said, 'Will your Ladyship remove Lady Amalia from the convent where she is so happy?' 'I would not remove her contrary to her inclinations,' said she; 'but if my grand-daughter would return voluntarily, it would be a great happiness for me.' 'So suddenly,' I replied, 'without any warning to the lady Abbess?' 'The Abbess is a good woman, of kindly nature,' said she, 'and will pardon my precipitation in consideration of my age.' I, therefore, accepted her Ladyship's commission, although reluctantly; but I could not do otherwise. Moreover, I must say, the poor old lady is sensibly declining, wasting away visibly; and it would, I am convinced, be a great comfort to her to have Lady Amalia with her."



The countenance of the Abbess was clouded by this appeal. She felt strongly excited, more from love to Lady Amalia Fossombroni than from regard to the interest of the convent. She knew the world so well that she saw the danger of Lady Amalia's being lost to them for ever if she once quitted their society. However, she composed her voice to a tranquil tone, and, mastering her emotion, replied :


“ Your intelligence causes me both astonishment and grief. I am sorry to lose Lady Amalia, because I love her ; but I regret it much more, because an obstacle will thus be placed in the way of her vocation.”

“ I, too, have thought of that, Mother ; and it was that consideration which made this visit repugnant to my feelings. I do but execute the orders of the Marchioness, although, on the other hand, I really pity her melancholy position, from having sustained so many domestic bereavements, and am almost induced, I must confess, to approve of her resolution. Still, if Lady Amalia feels the vocation to a holy life, she will not lose it by her residence in the Marchioness's house ; indeed, it will sooner there be

confirmed than otherwise ; and, after the death of the Marchioness, which must too surely take place before long, she will return to the convent, to remain here for ever. Besides, Mother, allow me to remind you, that all the pupils who desire to become nuns, leave the convent on trial a year before entering for probation ; and this absence will be no more for Lady Amalia than the customary year of trial."

"As the Marchioness is decided that Amalia should leave, I cannot, nor will I, offer any objection," said the Abbess, rather drily ; "but we must first consult the young person herself. She may not, under any circumstances, choose to quit us, but prefer to remain ; and the Marchioness, as a pious woman, would not, I am sure, oppose the vocation of her grand-daughter, when she must expect so quickly to render an account of her conduct."

Don Giuseppe had previously had an interview with the young lady, and, by exciting her natural affection, he had induced her to consent to leave the convent in order to be her relative's companion. He, therefore, replied



to the Abbess, in an under tone, as if he would soften the effect of the admission :

“I have already spoken to her ladyship on the subject.”

Had the face of the Abbess been visible, Don Giuseppe would have seen the blood mount to her very temples, and would have noted a glance of wrath flash from her eye. But he did not see this, and only traced in the tones of her voice the ill-repressed resentment.

“If you have already spoken to Lady Amalia, I have nothing more to add ; it rests between yourself and her. Be it so then, and let us hope that God will maintain her vocation amidst the temptations of the world, and the more, as she will have you for her adviser.”

Don Giuseppe, assuring the Abbess of his zeal to this effect, took his leave and departed.

CHAPTER III.

ADIEUX.

To Lady Amalia the idea of leaving the convent was really most painful. In parting, however, she had the satisfaction of observing the sincere affliction of her young companions and the sisters, and receiving the tender tokens of their affection. Such demonstrations afford in some measure a compensation for the grief that is experienced in separating from beloved ones.

The Abbess, although accustomed to repress her emotions, could not, on this occasion, hide all the extent of her affliction. She was losing a treasure in Amalia, and, knowing the attractions of the world, she dared not flatter herself that she would ever return. She knew that she was too brilliant a jewel to grace a con-

vent. She had hoped that she had found in her a daughter who would become a nun, and ever remain at her side, cheering, with her gentle affections, the rigidity of convent monotony. Concealing, however, as much as possible, her sorrow as inconsistent with her dignity, she called Amalia to her a few hours before her departure. Possessing great strength of mind and judgment, she would not attempt to dissuade the young girl from obeying her grandmother's will. The beloved maiden stood before her, with cast-down eyes, into which the tears were stealing. The Abbess gazed upon her for a few moments with looks of affection. Taking her trembling hand within her own—"You are really going to leave us, then, dear Amalia," said she.

The maiden, in suppressed tones, replied—

"Mother, I cannot refuse my dear grandmother the consolation of my society. I am the only one who remains to her;" and she wiped the tears from her eyes.

"I do not blame you, my love, but I much fear that, having returned to the world, you will never come back to us to consecrate yourself to God."

"Oh, yes, mother! I shall come back."

"Well, we will hope it. Beware of the seductions of the world. I speak to you as a mother. You know that I love you with maternal affection."


These words, uttered in the gentlest accents, seemed really the breathings of a mother's heart.

"Ah, yes," answered Amalia, raising her tearful eyes to the face of the Abbess, with the most charming expression of love and confidence, "and I love you as a daughter. I have no other mother to love."

"Seductive young men will flutter around you," continued the nun, with a more severe tone, but still manifesting the same solicitude. "They will whisper in your ear words of enchantment. Beware of them."

"I shall live as retired as in the convent, mother, and shall see no one," timidly answered Amalia.

"That cannot be. The world will glitter around you in deceptive splendour. You will find yourself encircled by a blaze of light, that will bewilder your senses, and blind your faculties; but it will prove a mere deception. You



will be in the midst of gaiety and mirth, exposed to the allurements of pleasure, but these joys will leave a void in your soul and deaden your love to God."

Had a more experienced eye watched the varying countenance of the Abbess as she uttered these words in so excited a manner, the secrets of her heart might, perhaps for the first time, have been penetrated ; but Amalia received them with reverential admiration, as the inspiration of holy zeal.

"Oh, no! I shall see nothing of all this. My good, dear grandmother is very old, and lives in complete retirement. But, even supposing I had the opportunity, I would not. Oh, no! I never would."

"I know, my dearest, it will not happen during the life of your grandmother ; but she must pay nature's tribute—nor is the moment far distant when she will exchange this life for a better. Then you will be exposed to all these snares."

"God will perhaps grant me the favour to continue my grandmother's life for some time to come ; but, whenever the sad moment arrives that I must bid her adieu, I shall fly to this


sacred retreat. The world will have no seductions for me."

"That such is your design at this moment I doubt not. May the Lord give you strength to persevere in it. I am willing to hope he may; but, should this not be the case, you will often have reason to think of these my parting counsels."

With forced dignity, she kissed the young girl's forehead, but Amalia felt the scalding tears upon her brow, and the pressure of her lips was fervent and prolonged. The weeping maiden was tempted to throw herself into the arms of the Abbess, but a feeling of awe restrained her.

"The emotions of the heart must be moderated, my dear daughter," concluded the worthy Abbess, in a tone as if addressing the admonition to herself. "I am very grieved to lose you, but too deep an attachment to earthly objects is calculated to cool our devotion to the heavenly bridegroom. Remember us. Pray for us. We will pray for you."

One more affectionate kiss was imprinted on the dear brow. "Now go and take your leave of the other nuns, and of your companions."



She led her by the hand to the door. Amalia quitted the presence of the Abbess, sobbing violently. The latter watched her, as she retired, with looks of affection; then closed the door, and prayed—invoked a benediction upon the head of that dear child.

CHAPTER IV.


THE FATE OF A FAMILY.

IN a lordly mansion in the city of Lunaco dwelt the Marchioness of Fossombroni, a lady of ancient family, who had attained to a very advanced period of life. With her resided a young girl, the daughter of her son. These two were the only surviving members of a once more numerous family. The unfortunate marchioness had lost two sons, one young and unmarried, the other, who died at thirty, leaving an inconsolable widow and his little daughter Amalia, then about three years of age. In her twelfth year Amalia was called upon to part from her mother. How often does death ravage a house in a very brief space ! Having once gained admission, he seems reluctant to spare a single victim.



The orphan had no recollection of the gentle, paternal caresses lavished upon her ; but she too well remembered the unlimited tenderness of her mother, of whom she was bereaved whilst still so young. Thus she made early acquaintance with grief. The Marchioness, so deprived of her sons and her daughter-in-law, whom she had loved as her own child, had now no relative left but Amalia. Her grandchild was the sole remaining bond which attached her to life. To Amalia her grandmother supplied the place of the dear relatives she had lost. She centred upon her all the warm affection of her sensitive heart. The yearning of her soul was the more intense, because it was sad, not joyful ; the love of an orphan to her only remaining support.

Though without her grandchild the Marchioness must live in the most desolate solitude, she still determined to part from her, that she might be educated in a convent, where the young ladies of good family in Italy generally receive their education. At the time of our narrative, Amalia was about eighteen. She had left the convent, under the circumstances we




have already described, about four months. Pure and ingenuous, she knew but little of the world, nay, she was disposed, from educational prejudices, to regard it with aversion.

CHAPTER V.

PERFECT IDEAL OF A BEAUTY NOT IDEAL.

THE beauty of Amalia was not of that regular kind which gives life to marble, and to the living beauty the expression of marble. Hers was not the precision of Grecian art, with irreproachable lines, constituting an earthly idealism, embodied in the sensual inspirations of mythology. Nor was it that celestial beauty, devoid of earthliness, like the pictures of the Madonnas and saints, with which Italian artists etherealized the features of their mistresses, making them the models of their religious idealism. It was a beauty partaking of both, which, if it rendered her the less perfect, only left her free to be the more attractive. Her large brown eye, of lucid transparency, had a somewhat unquiet look of indetermination ; but

its glancing light indicated ineffable sweetness, and a combination of affection and enthusiasm. Her polished brow showed benignancy, and betokened serenity of mind, save when, now and then, the lightest possible shade seemed to flit across it, like a phantasmic vaporous cloud which instantly dissolves into air, and melts into the refulgent splendour of the heavens. Her lips were rather full. Her features, viewed in profile, presented lines somewhat uncertain, but not so imperfect as to deprive the face of its claims to artistic grace. The full face would have been a triumphant success for an artist. The side view presented that modified perfection which is a frequent characteristic of the most impassioned beauties. She had soft and rich black tresses, and her finely-arched eyebrows were of the darkest tint. Her hands were exquisitely moulded, her feet so delicately small they seemed scarcely to touch the ground. Her complexion, no cold whiteness of snow, was rather the transparency of ivory. Her voice sounded slightly veiled. It was rather deep and sonorous, and somewhat tremulous. Such voices seem to spring not from the organs of articulation, but from the heart,



and produce an irresistible sensation of enchantment, thrilling through the soul of the listener. The clearest and most musical of voices cannot compare with it. Fatal are those voices which touch the inmost fibre, and make it thrill! It was a voice intoned with the softened murmur of the dove.

The personal charms of Amalia were the reflex of her moral nature. Her temperament was ardent, affectionate, enthusiastic, yielding, energetic, and imaginative. She possessed the characteristics of a woman who is a compound of sweetness, pliability, and heroism. A woman armed with her weaknesses is more interesting and irresistible than another who commands our veneration rather than love.

CHAPTER VI.

A CASE OF EVERY-DAY OCCURRENCE.

A THIRD person resided in the house with the venerable Marchioness and her grand-daughter. This was the Chaplain, Don Giuseppe. He belonged to a family which had formerly filled a most respectable station, but whose means were now very restricted. His father was severe and imperious, and obliged his son to assume the clerical garb to serve his own interested ends. Don Giuseppe had not the vocation for a religious life ; but he dared not oppose the will of his father, knowing that he had nothing to expect but harshness, should he venture to dispute his wishes on attaining the requisite age ; therefore he took holy orders, and bound himself for ever.

Seeing no way to retract, he reasoned with


himself, and determined to consult his own interest. For this purpose he put on a mask—the mask of hypocrisy. Thus he made a boast of piety, and was believed to be good. The Marchioness of Fossombroni required a domestic chaplain, and thought herself fortunate in obtaining Don Giuseppe; and he was delighted, for the engagement was a most eligible position for him, and he even cherished the hope of a rich legacy on the death of the Marchioness. He had resided with her for two years when her grand-daughter returned from the convent. Although young, Don Giuseppe had a crafty tenderness fitted to captivate the confidence of the devout lady, who was easily led by his talents, which were real, by his exemplary piety, which was false; and he consequently enjoyed great authority in the family.

In Don Giuseppe's case, a generous nature and intelligent mind were disturbed and corrupted at their fount by the inflexible will of a father, who, imposing iron bonds upon his son, did violence to his inclinations, deadening his sentiments of rectitude, in order to make a trade of his own flesh and blood.

CHAPTER VII.

METAMORPHOSES.

FROM the time of Amalia's return, the house assumed a totally different aspect. Previously, the desolate matron seemed like a spirit that haunted the place; nor was the grave and serious aspect of the chaplain calculated to enliven its gloom. The servants felt the depressing influence, and not a ray of joy came to cheer the mansion. But now the smile of youth and beauty irradiates the gloomy walls, sparkles through the dull rooms, and gleams through the air as though it were instinct with a new life. Now, beside the tottering step of infirm age, and the grave walk of the austere priest, the rapid footfall of youth, the musical rustling of girlish




attire, and the lovely form of beauty are heard and seen flitting about from place to place.

How much more swiftly flew the hours of the Marchioness, with her grand-daughter at her side, to cheer her infirmities with her constant watchfulness and loving attention! Notwithstanding the sad remembrance of her bitter losses, blessed with the charming company of Amalia, she could not feel that she had lost every thing in the persons of her dear departed children. The character of the young girl, too, was well adapted to comfort her. Now she would reason seriously with grave countenance, and advance arguments in which, with high and thoughtful consideration, she would give proof of a cultivated mind and correct judgment and fine feeling. Again, she would be cheerful and gay, and shed around her the bright sunshine of joyousness. She was so lovely that she was dear to every one, but most of all, to Don Giuseppe.


A great change was soon apparent in the habits of the chaplain. Before Amalia's return, he certainly manifested no great enjoyment in the company of the Marchioness. She

was a good kind lady, it is true, but old and infirm ; nor were her mental powers of so high an order as to make those who conversed with her forget her great age. That delicacy of sentiment which induces a noble soul to attach itself to the infirm and feeble, as a son to his parents, was altogether foreign to Don Giuseppe's nature. His disposition was too severe, harsh, and unyielding, to incline to the delicate task of consoling the Marchioness. He therefore, in his intercourse with her, scrupulously performed his duties as chaplain, and nothing more. Mass, prayers, spiritual conversation, and indispensable duties he attended to, as a matter of course, being hired for performing them. He was attentive, respectful, and useful, as far as the sphere of his duties extended, and thus secured the approbation of the Marchioness, and that sufficed for him. His duties finished, he retired, as soon as delicacy would allow, and was little liberal of his company to the old lady. He shut himself up in his own apartments, to occupy himself with the studies in which he was engrossed from motives of ambition. One of his inducements for becoming domestic chaplain,




was, that the office would afford him time and opportunity to prepare a course of lenten sermons. His imposing and severe aspect, his manly voice, his profound learning, his dignified and graceful attitude and carriage, all were gifts calculated to render him a perfect orator. Having therefore prepared a course of sermons, a splendid career would present itself to him. He would be sought in all the principal cities of the peninsula, handsomely remunerated, lauded to the skies; and thus he might in a few years raise himself to a distinguished position, and perhaps to the topmost rank of the hierarchy—the probable lot of the talented sacred orators who acquire great fame.

How was the change now seen in him to be accounted for? Not immediately, but gradually, after the arrival of Amalia, he remained to converse for a longer time with the ladies. He sat longer at table, confined himself much less to his own rooms, and, when there, was engrossed in his own thoughts, instead of pursuing his studies as formerly. He began to be social in company, and altogether more cheerful and agreeable than he used to be. His conver-



sation lost its severe tone. It seemed to be remodelled in a lighter style, and was much more interesting. Formerly, to the domestics, his manners were rigid and haughty, as if he would exact respect ; now, he was gentle and affable, as if he sought to captivate the affections of all. In short, he was altogether another man. What could have effected so strange a metamorphosis ? We can scarcely tell. He himself scarcely knew, or he would not know it. A strange sensation, until now unknown, took possession of his soul. In another man it would have been a gentle sentiment, and might have been indulged with noble pride ; but in a priest, it was a reprehensible sentiment—a crime. It insinuates itself into the mind imperceptibly ; but, once there, it gains the complete mastery.—It is love !

At first, the emotion lay hidden under the aspect of that graceful condescension, which a learned man bestows on an innocent girl, and it seemed nothing more than indulgent kindness. Soon it changed to an intercourse that seemed to equalize the moral condition of the two. Later, it appeared altogether fraternal, or, at least, Don Giuseppe endeavoured to represent it to himself




as such, in his industrious self-deception. Before long, at moments when he thought himself unperceived, his eye would rest upon her with fiery glances, and his breast would swell with excitement. He drank from those beautiful lucent eyes the poison of a fatal passion. For him the musical accents of adorable ingenuousness, pronounced by those lovely lips, were syren notes that bewitched his soul. From that sweet, lovely, rosy face emanated a profusion of charms, that inundated his breast with a new unaccustomed delight.

But he slept secure, and feared not the effects of the new-born passion. As yet, it was enfolded in discreet reserve, or rather in fear, and, retiring within itself, it reposed timidly in the secret recesses of his heart. Amalia, in her simplicity, observed it not; and how should she, if the priest himself, subtle as he was, scarcely took cognizance of it? A day, however, arrived, when he had reason to know the exact state of his mind; but the knowledge came too late; his heart was already a rebel. The tempest already raged in his bosom, and it was no longer in his power to expel it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAIDEN AND THE GENTLEMAN IN BLACK.

It was a beautiful evening, about the end of March. Don Giuseppe was walking in the garden. The moon shed forth its placid light. Not a breath of air was stirring, or at least, only the very lightest breeze sighed through the leaves, as fair winged spirits fanning their wings between the boughs, and diffusing heavenly perfumes. He wandered slowly through the wooded paths. Smiling thoughts of gentleness and benevolence filled his mind. He was no longer the austere man he was. He loved every one, and every object in creation. His heart was now alive to the charms of nature. A tender image softened his bosom—the image of Amalia.



It was not yet graven there in characters of fire. His affection for her did not yet amount to a sin.

The sound of a light step, turning a corner, behind him, fell upon his ear. He felt an irresistible inclination to turn at that sound. He hoped for a meeting, and little thought how fatal that meeting might prove. Apparently rather thoughtful, her mind pre-occupied with fantastic imaginings, Amalia approaches. Nature had begun to speak to her with its inner voice, and her bosom swelled with the religious concentration of her spirit. A mysterious palpitation agitated her heart, producing a sensation of delicious sadness, quite new to her. It was an appeal of nature inviting her to love.

"Ah!" exclaimed she, with an expression of alarm.

"What is it that frightens Lady Amalia?" asked he, in soft, and somewhat tremulous tones.

"Oh, it is you, Don Giuseppe! You really frightened me. To see a tall figure, with a long black coat, coming towards me, slowly and solemnly, seemed like an apparition or a spirit."

Don Giuseppe most heartily cursed the long, long black coat at that moment. "Your ladyship was abstracted," said he, suddenly, and rather tartly; "and perhaps some rosy thoughts were interrupted by the black apparition."

The maiden experienced a sentiment of compunction, fearing that she had spoken rudely to him, and the more, that, as a priest, she respected him. With innocent familiarity, as if to make her peace with him, she approached, and laying her hand upon his arm, moved a step forward, thus tacitly,—with ingenuous and graceful simplicity—inviting him to do the same. He felt the pressure of her hand upon his arm course through his veins like fire; but by a violent effort he composed himself, and continued in a tone of affected indifference, "What were you thinking about, Lady Amalia? Some subject, I am sure, in harmony with this beautiful evening?"

Looking within herself, she had the tact to perceive that it would not be well to tell what was passing in her mind a few instants before, and she answered the question of the priest by saying,—

“ Oh, nothing. I was only enjoying the beautiful night.”

That which had remained undecided in the mind of Don Giuseppe during the course of months, was decided at length in a single second. The passion which had hitherto reposed dormant in his heart, now awoke. In an instant it assumed a degree of force which nothing hereafter could vanquish. The new passion raged in his breast as though a lion had just awoke from his slumbers. He quickly learned the nature of the sentiment. It was tremendous and unconquerable, as it must ever be in the bosom of a priest, when once admitted, if not immediately repelled. A glance of hope shot through his mind that the maiden, ingenuous and untutored in passion's lore, with her heart yet vacant, though so disposed to love, might easily be gained, and with this wicked project in view, he at once commenced his diabolical arts.

“ Ah ! yes,” said he, gently, “ you could not help being enchanted with this lovely night. What can be compared to its splendour ? All nature breathes love. Do you feel its myste-

rious fragrance which expands itself in the development of the plants whose secret endearments are hidden from the profane eye by the shadows of night? You feel how the quickening zephyrs float sweetly around, and caress smoothly our countenance. The moon, with placid ray, looks down, as the quiet spectator of the tacit loves of nature, which experiences a revival of vigour in this fresh spring season."

The innocent girl felt in listening to his impassioned language a sensation of delight, and also of trepidation, but she made no reply; and the priest, growing more enthusiastic, continued, "Yes, this mutual sympathy" — he did not venture to say love—"is the supreme law of creation. Cast your eyes, dear Lady Amalia, towards the azure vaults of heaven. Look at the stars shining above our heads, suspended in beautiful order in the immense void, nor deviating from their assigned course. It is by mutual sympathy that they are thus regulated in faultless order and harmony. Their sympathy is the well-spring of life; the power by which existence is maintained."

Amalia's whole frame trembled. He felt the

tremor, and exulted in it. He hoped that he had touched her heart. Believing this tremor to be the precursor of love, he was proceeding, but the hand which, with innocent confidence, she had continued to rest on his arm, was suddenly withdrawn, and fell quickly to her side. Instinct, which is so often the safeguard of virtuous and ingenuous souls, warned her that these words, however sublime they sounded, had a double meaning, and were intended to instil poison through her ear into her heart. In removing her hand she involuntarily withdrew a step from him, and with trepidation, and not without bitterness, exclaimed, "Oh, Don Giuseppe!" and Don Giuseppe felt that his insidious words had roused suspicion instead of love. A glance of anger, sorrow and desperation shone in his eye, and was almost discernible in the chaste light of the moon. He knew that all was lost, unless he remedied his position immediately. Nor did the means of repairing his error fail him. He scrupled not to use any method that was likely to answer his purpose. As if he had perceived neither the removal of the hand, nor the exclamation which seemed

intended as a reproach, he turned these impassioned sentiments, with impious artifice, into religious ardour, and thus continued. "Observing the uninterrupted order and harmony with which the heavens and all created things are regulated, ought we not to admire the Providence which bound all things together with such loving bonds, with a view to their preservation? Let us turn our thoughts to the heavens, 'which declare the glory of God.' If all animated nature raises hymns of praise to God, how much rather ought man to use his high intelligence, as the interpreter of the creation, in praise of its Creator!"

While uttering these words, so sublime, though dictated by insincerity, the dangerous priest seemed to be inspired. From that moment he made use of the cloak of piety and became a consummate hypocrite, concealing under a virtuous exterior, a corrupt heart. He had already laid his plans for enslaving the mind of his intended victim.

While listening to the conclusion of his rhapsody, Amalia reproached herself for the shadow of aversion she had felt towards him, and was

more than ever confirmed in her belief of his exalted piety. She now felt the highest admiration for the sublime conceptions he had expressed, and concluded by mentally resolving to put her whole trust in him.

With these different reflections they retired to their respective apartments, the one to sink into the placid slumber of innocence, the other to experience all the agonies of a furious and delusive passion.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO ITALIAN FAMILIES.

IN this province of Italy, as more or less in all, the months that are passed in the country are more cheerful and delightful. Formality and etiquette are laid aside ; all difference of rank seems forgotten between persons of civil condition. Thoughts of rustic pleasures and simple pastimes are suggested by the beautiful prospects offered by nature, by the purity of the air, by the profusion of fruits and the abundant crops which clothe the country in splendour. Here the citizen moves in perfect familiarity with the nobleman. In Italy, with the abolition of feudalism, the most familiar condescension was introduced, and is still more a characteristic of the country.

Signor Fantoni and his wife were residing in their country house, which was near to that of the Fossombroni family. They were of middle rank, and possessed of rather an ample fortune. They had an only son, named Francesco, who was their glory and their hope. The Fossombroni family was yet undisturbed by death, and they and the Fantoni moved together as excellent neighbours. Though their stations were not equal, they were not so dissimilar as to make mutual familiarity repugnant to either. The fathers of the two children, men held in high consideration for honesty and intelligence, were both remarkably courteous. The young mothers of Amalia and Francesco were amiable and graceful, and the former free from all pride, so that they lived on the most friendly terms; enjoyed each other's society with the utmost familiarity, their intercourse being entirely divested of all tiresome ceremony. Amalia's mother, in the severe loss she sustained on the death of her husband, received affectionate and sincere sympathy from her neighbour, and from her friendship derived more consolation than from any other source. Amalia and Francesco

were great friends in their early life, and were constantly associated in the innocence and carelessness of childish play. Francesco was three years the senior of Amalia. They amused themselves in the garden, or chased each other along the courts, with infantine simplicity. She would throw flowers into his face, or strike him with grass or hay, and then skip off to escape his playful vengeance—the torture of a kiss. He would climb the trees, with marvellous agility and daring, to the great terror of his little companion, to gather the first ripe fruit, and present it with cavalier air to his youthful lady-love. She would cull for him lovely bouquets, and present them with a charming smile of innocent tenderness. Sometimes she would play him a trick. Holding to his lips some beautiful fruit—a cherry or strawberry perhaps—at the moment that he opened his mouth in delighted expectation to receive it, she would suddenly snatch it away and transfer it to her own, leaving him with his mouth full of air. Seeing him half angry, half mortified, she would pacify him with a sweet and unexpected salute. They chased the sheep and lambs, running amidst the

flocks, and frightening the timid animals in every direction. When they met a drove of cattle with their formidable horns, he would raise his stick boldly, like a little Paladin, to protect his frightened beauty. When tired, they seated themselves under the shade of their favourite trees. He would make her a soft cushion of grass, and, as they reposed, they would indulge in mutual confidences.

CHAPTER X.

HUMANIZING INFLUENCE OF THE GENTLE
AFFECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD.

WHEN Amalia grew older, and became an orphan, she was placed by her devout grandmother in a convent; Francesco was sent to a seminary. But they ever retained grateful recollections of these delightful years, never to be recalled. Francesco had already made great progress in his studies. He had received prizes and commendations in abundance, and he exulted in his success, because Amalia would exult, and would be proud if he raised himself above his fellow students. Animated by this idea, he studied with more and more intensity, and his mind, filled with the hope of pleasing her, be-

came increasingly noble and amiable. At the time of Amalia's return, Francesco had already for three years been studying law at the university of Padua. His personal appearance, amidst the youth of Italy, was remarkable, even among the most distinguished, and his talent shone conspicuous. His frame was strong, and developed with vigorous elegance. His composed countenance, in serious and dignified amiability, was striking from its purity of contour, and interesting from its robust pallor, the effect of which was heightened by his fine black hair. His large dark eye was equally expressive of affection or anger; the former always judiciously bestowed, the latter excited only by love of justice, and ever free from passion. His spacious and noble forehead bore witness to the high imaginings which filled his mind. His manners were somewhat reserved, without being cold or stiff. Young as he was, his mental growth was very conspicuous. To his enthusiastic spirit poetry spoke. He sung of love in tender strains, although love did not yet thrill through his heart; for his fondness for Amalia was merely a sweet and dear memory of child-

hood, which had nothing in common with exciting passion. He saw her still a child, nor could he fancy her a woman. His songs as yet hovered in the region of idealism.

CHAPTER XI.

MYSTERIOUS SENSATIONS.

It was Easter. The University, as usual, was closed for a fortnight, and Francesco flew to the embrace of his parents. They were now residing at their country house, enjoying the freshness of the early spring in the midst of the beauties of nature, who was just presenting herself in new attire, after throwing aside the coarse apparel of winter. Here a fragrance of the young grass, and springing flowers; there a delicious fanning of Zephyrs, with an opening of green in the fields and meadows; here again trees, white, red, and yellow, all in flower; the bleating flocks and lowing herds, the birds joyously warbling, the peasantry indulging in the merry song and dance, and the lords and ladies of the

town coming to enjoy the retirement of their country houses,—all bade welcome to the new-born spring.

Like the rest, the Marchioness, with Amalia and the chaplain, went into the country. They were near to Francesco and his parents, but all intercourse had ceased between the families. After the death of her daughter-in-law, the Marchioness had led so completely the life of a recluse, that the Fantoni had ceased even to call upon her. The two young people had not met for many years ; but they still retained sweet recollections of their childhood's intercourse. To Amalia, perhaps, the most tender, excepting those connected with her beloved mother ; but they regarded them as childish recollections.

One morning Amalia went to call upon a widow lady in the neighbourhood, the Countess Belfiore, who, with her children, was staying in the country. She went without opposition, having asked permission of her grandmother in the absence of the chaplain, who certainly, had he been present, would have cleverly discovered some obstacle. To serve his own purpose he always endeavoured to excite the timidity of the Mar-

chioness. Suspicious himself, he tried to arouse her jealousy, or rather, the priest being jealous, endeavoured to arouse the suspicions of the grandmother.

Had Amalia any secret reason for desiring to pay this visit, beyond the pleasure of seeing her friend, the Countess? The daughters of the lady were young, the eldest not yet thirteen; hence, from the difference in age, although much attached to each other, their intercourse could not be confidential.

Francesco visited at the house, and the Countess treated him with the courteous deference due to his talents. Amalia knew this. Devout as she was, although every day she spent hours and hours in orisons, notwithstanding she was so superstitious, still she was young, with an affectionate heart, unaccustomed to keep over it a strict control, and guard it from surprise. The air around her, as around him, infused love with mysterious agitation, balmed by their mutual breathing—it was the same air in which were moving two beings formed for each other.

From the Countess and her family, the most

welcome reception awaited Amalia ; but she was not cheerful, for she did ~~not~~ feel at ease. They were alone, and had no visitors staying with them. She strove to affect the cheerfulness that she did not feel.

She experienced, without being able to account for it, an uncertain, indefinable sensation of sadness. It was the warning of presentiment which announced to her the solemn passage from a life without care, without passion, to one of cares, of passions, of love. A few brief moments, and life's book would be opened before her eyes, written in characters blotted with tears, and coloured with the sombre tints of grief.

CHAPTER XII.

CHIVALRIC DECLARATIONS.

THE Countess and her daughters were in a room on the ground floor opening on the garden, as is usual in the country. Groups of flowers of grateful fragrance charmed the senses. Before them stretched one of the most beautiful gardens that can be imagined. At a little distance a wooded mountain rose as a background to the picture, and in its bosom rested a spacious and deep valley. The scene was truly charming, and the air was most fragrant and balmy.

Visitors enter the house without knocking. In the country no etiquette is maintained. Friends are never announced. The door stands

open, and thieves may gain ready access. In this happy country, however, no one fears thieves ; but a thief entered this morning and bore away a heart !

Suddenly, with frank, but not too boisterous confidence, the entrance door is thrown open. " Oh Francesco !" joyfully exclaimed the children, running to surround him, while one of five years old clasps his knees in her embrace, her head hardly reaching above them. He approaches the Countess, and, in cavalier style—according to use and wont in Italy—kisses her hand, salutes her daughter with friendly politeness, and caresses the youngest, without looking round or observing any one else.


There is some one in the room who at the sound of that name, pronounced by her little friends, feels her heart throb with a sudden start, " Oh, how handsome ! How noble !" almost escaped her lips on beholding him. Her heart beat wildly with a palpitation, the precursor of wilder agitations, which she was quite unable to restrain. It is the first throb of love. Thy fate is decided, loving maiden ! Thou feelest the first throb of love, mysterious, sweet, celes-

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tial, painful, and now thou art numbered among the initiated! With a graceful movement of timid embarrassment and confusion, she turned a little aside, to hide her lovely face from him, thus betraying her ill-repressed emotion.

The Countess, either with playful malice, or altogether unthinkingly, pointed to Amalia, saying to Francesco, "Here is an old acquaintance of yours." Amalia, her face suffused with rich blushes, answered half playfully and half perplexed, turning towards him with adorable timidity, "Ah, he will not remember me."

He heard the gentle tones. They were those of a well-known voice, although its notes were firmer and more touching than when last they greeted his ear. It was a voice which filled his heart with delight, its inmost fibres responding to its vibrations as of old, yet with greater intensity. He looked at her, and beheld a friendly face which smiled to his soul as the clear bright sky of his native land smiles to the returning pilgrim. He recognized the beloved features of that dear face which was the joy of his unconscious childhood. In a single instant how many



sweet remembrances crowded his mind, of caresses, of affections, of the hours passed in innocent and blessed intimacy in the meadows, on the plain, on the hill, in the wood, in the fields. But the infantile characteristics of that face had disappeared. At sight of her he felt a renewal of all his old tenderness; but blended now with a more decided affection, strong and gigantic, henceforth invincible—with love. She modestly cast down her eyes, which she had raised caressingly to his face, with a smile of mingled sweetness and melancholy.

He regarded her with a gentle look of complaisance, though with some degree of confusion, and taking her unresisting hands, and drawing them gently towards him, exclaimed, “What! not remember Amalia? Amalia, who left along the course of my life a trace of joy and happiness which can never more be effaced? Amalia, who so gladdened my childhood’s existence that in future years, however sad the actualities of life might be, yet the recollection of those happy days must ever shed gladness on my heart to the latest hour of my being.”

At these words she raised her eyes, in which



trembled the hurried pearls of love, and with a smile of gentle confidence she pressed, for a moment, the hand which still held both hers.

CHAPTER XIII.

RETURN TO MODERN ACTUALITIES.

WITHOUT abusing the indulgence of the Countess, this tender discourse could not be prolonged. Indeed, Francesco felt that it had already been carried a little too far. He approached Lady Belfiore, therefore, and begged her to excuse if, carried away by emotion, he had for a moment forgotten the respect due to her. He said that he was sure, kind as she was, she would pardon his forgetfulness, which was caused by the pleasure of seeing the companion of his early years, so long a time having elapsed since they met, and their present meeting being so very unexpected. The Countess kindly answered with a cheerful and friendly smile, that, far from being

offended, she was exceedingly gratified that this happy meeting had taken place in her house. She could, she said, fully appreciate and willingly sanction, the indulgence of their delicate and natural emotions on first seeing each other, and would have regretted that the restraint of her presence should detract from its interest, for, indeed, she rejoiced with them, as their mutual friend. Francesco was guarded after his first impulse. He conversed gracefully with all, was pleasant and cheerful, but it did not escape the eye of the Countess, nor that of Amalia, that he was greatly overcome by emotion.

In the innocent and simple mind of the eldest daughter of the Countess, the occurrence appeared nothing more than the natural manifestation of pleasure caused by meeting accidentally after the lapse of so many years. Amalia exerted herself to be gay and easy, but the tremulousness of her voice, the frequent heaving of her bosom, and the involuntary unsteadiness of her hand, betrayed her real sensations. Francesco, with true delicacy, soon took his leave, not, however, without whispering in her ear, so as to avoid being overheard, "We shall meet again." He

departed, leaving her the subject of impressions that could never be effaced.


When he was gone, Amalia did her best, though without success, to compose herself. She knew not what to say. The Countess looked at her kindly, but left her to her embarrassment, without speaking a word. At length Amalia, with maidenly modesty, made an effort to speak.

"I little expected this meeting"—this delightful meeting, she would have said, had her lips uttered the promptings of her heart. The Countess replied significantly—

"No, but do you regret it, my dear child? I should be grieved if it had annoyed you."

"Oh, my dear madam, how could I feel annoyed? To meet with the friend of my infancy, and so dear a friend as he was to me—it would be wrong indeed to feel annoyed, and especially when everybody speaks so well of him!"

The Countess smiled, and, before long, Amalia rose to take leave, saying that her time was expired, but, in reality, impatient to find herself alone, that she might revel in the new sensations which had taken possession of her.



CHAPTER XIV.

HEDGES HAVE EYES.

WITH slow step she crossed the meadows and fields which separated her own residence from that of the Countess. In appearance she was the same girl that trod that path an hour or two earlier, but how changed was her soul! But no, she was not the same even in appearance. As she went, she was jocund and gay, stopping perpetually, now to look at a flower, now to observe a tree in full leaf, now to listen to a bird warbling with ardent song its notes of love among the branches. Nothing escaped her attention. But this was the last time she would cross those meadows in gladsome liberty. On her return how changed she was! She passed along the same path, but, her mind pre-occupied with

dreams, she little heeded any of the charms of nature. Her thoughts were directed to one single object. Her whole mind was engrossed with new and sweet, but at the same time pensive thoughts. She mused with delight on Francesco.

In this beatific, dreamy state, completely absorbed in her own thoughts, she moved on almost unconsciously, and passed by a small thicket of trees. Unobserved by her, from among the leaves, a fiery glance steadily regarded her, like the eye of an evil genius. The glance of this mysterious, scrutinising eye was a tremendous combination of love and jealousy. It seemed endued with the power of envenoming the air, of withering the plants, of fading the flowers and herbage, of annihilating her! It was the glance of Don Giuseppe.

He had learned that she was gone to pay this visit, and, with fatal presentiment, he foresaw the consequences. He left the house, and took a position from which he might observe all that passed. He watched and saw Francesco leave the Countess's house with an air of confidence and joy, and read his satisfaction in his face.

Don Giuseppe could have stabbed him at that moment. That radiant countenance assured him of love returned and conceded to another by her who was the object of his sacrilegious idolatry. Still concealed, he watched Amalia as she returned to the house. To him the change in her was clearly perceptible. He divined the new thoughts that were passing through her mind. His suspicions were confirmed. Jealousy possessed him, and he meditated execrable schemes of vengeance.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIRST DELIGHTS OF AN INNOCENT LOVE
EMBITTERED.

IN a state of unusual agitation of mind, Amalia reached the house. She was followed by a man habited in black. His eye, too, was black, but his heart was still blacker. Dark thoughts clouded his brow, and his meditations were fearful. With furtive step, and concealed as much as possible by the plants and inequalities of the ground, he followed her, his stealthy course suggesting the tortuous movement of the serpent.

The young girl entered the principal apartment of the mansion, and, for the first time, failed to run to salute her grandmother after her short absence ; not that she forgot her, but

that she desired to dwell on the absorbing thought.

But the absorbing subject is suddenly interrupted. A solemn step announces the approach of Don Giuseppe. He enters the room. Amalia pretending not to observe him, keeps her eye fixed on a book, which, on hearing him, she has taken up, and opened at hazard.

Perhaps the priest approaches the maiden to reproach her in harsh tones and severe language. Oh, no ! He would frustrate his own plans by doing so ; he is too acute for that. He is only a paid servant in the house. It is by artifice that he maintains his superiority and influence. If he did not know how, on occasion, to be bland, courteous, submissive—if he were not careful to observe the show of dependence, he might lose his ground ; he might even be compelled to quit the house, where, in effect, he is master, but where he is not yet so firmly established as to dare to assume the manners of one. Besides, about what, and to what purpose should he seem offended ? What authority has he over Amalia, except that which she herself concedes to him in his character of spiritual physi-

~~cian~~? It is essential then that he uses caution in the treatment of her mental malady, lest she should recover from ~~her~~ attack of scruples and dismiss her adviser ; and so he ~~desired~~ to prolong her indisposition. He therefore addressed her ~~with~~ a specious smile on his countenance. What a smile ! It was a mixture of bitter poison mingled with fallacious sweets—a smile of hypocritical suavity benignant with malignity.

“Dear Lady Amalia,” said he in his most insinuating tones of admiration and indulgence, “you have had a long walk ; I have not seen you all the morning. Are you not very tired ?”

“Oh, I have not been walking all the time, Don Giuseppe,” answered she innocently, in a tone still more gentle than usual, as if she would caress him to atone for hiding from him a secret which she had not the courage to disclose. “I have had a long rest, and in delightful company.” Her heart beat violently at this declaration, nor was his less excited. The one palpitated, however, with a gentle expansive palpitation ; the other with the rude, contracted throb of suppressed jealousy.

"Whom have you been to see?" asked he, his livid lip curved to a pretended smile that turned to a malicious sneer. She saw the smile without remarking the sinister meaning; yet it seemed to her a disagreeable smile.

"The Countess Belfiore. Oh, what a sweet woman she is! What amiable children they are! How sorry I am that they are so young, that there is so much difference of age between us. I should like to make friends of them—real friends—to tell them all my thoughts."

"You have thoughts, then," said the wily priest, "which you could not confide to any but friends?" Speaking with a marked accentuation, which seemed to be meant for jest, but which was far from being so in reality.

At this crafty question, Amalia's countenance paled under the scrutinizing glance of the priest. She was tempted to think that he was actuated by malice, having discovered the state of her mind. "But no," she thought, "he cannot be spiteful, and ask malicious questions."

"Oh, there are many frivolous things," said she, quite disconcerted, "that you cannot tell to anybody but friends—so—because—because

it would not be right to annoy other people with girlish nonsense."

"Love makes her cunning," thought the priest. *She loves!* thundered in his heart. "Oh, certainly," answered he, "because things of little moment cannot be told to the confessor."

At these words, uttered with significant manner, a thought shot through the mind of the youthful devotee like a flash of lightning; "Have I done wrong in thinking of a man—in encouraging Francesco? Perhaps I have committed a sin in looking at him so fixedly—perhaps it was wicked when he took my hand and I did not withdraw it, but abandoned it to the pressure of his with delight. I fear it was wrong to allow him, without opposition, to say such sweet, tender words, as he had no right perhaps to utter, nor I to hear."

Such thoughts chased each other tumultuously through her brain when Don Giuseppe so artfully named the confessor. But notwithstanding the scruples which arose within her, she had the presence of mind to reply—

"Oh, I have no secrets that I ought to tell

the confessor, dear Don Giuseppe," though apparently a little vexed, and colouring with confusion or displeasure.

"Another act of rebellion," said Don Giuseppe to himself. *She loves!* repeated the mysterious voice in his heart, yet more powerfully. But yet he was doubtful whether she could really love Francesco so soon, or whether she merely experienced a slight impression, produced by the remembrance of her childhood, which would soon be obliterated. Quickly, however, all doubt vanished. With his acuteness and knowledge of the human heart, it was impossible that he could long be deluded. He saw the too evident signs of an ardent love, the flames of which could never more be extinguished.

Though he could no longer doubt, he was still determined to probe this timid heart to its core, that he might afterwards the better torture it; like a wicked, cruel boy, who lays his snare to catch a harmless bird, strips it of its feathers while yet alive, and subjects it to the most barbarous tortures.

"You would have a great deal to say to the Countess and her daughters on meeting after

so long an absence. What lovely girls they are !”

“ Oh, they are sweet, amiable creatures,” answered Amalia warmly ; “ I do so love them, and I love the Countess as a mother ;” and a tear moistened her eye as she thought that she had no mother to whose heart to confide the secret of her own—a secret to communicate not to any but a mother or the very dearest friend.

“ I suppose, as it was so early, they were alone : were they not ?” asked Don Giuseppe.

This unexpected question caused Amalia the greatest embarrassment. She would have been thankful to make her escape, to hide herself. She never before experienced antipathy towards any one ; but she now felt to hate the inquisitive priest, who seemed to ask questions only for spite. She could not bring herself to confess that there was a caller, and who it was. She replied therefore, “ Yes, they were alone.” She spoke in a low tone, and with hesitation, for it was the first time that she had uttered a falsehood. “ Oh yes, they were alone,” repeated she.

“ A lie !” thought Don Giuseppe. *She loves !*

again thundered in his heart, which was bleeding with anguish.

For telling this untruth, she framed an excuse to herself to exonerate her conscience. Under priestly catechising she had learned subtlety. "I have not told a story," reasoned she with herself, "for we were alone at first for a long time."

During this conversation, that poor heart was laid bare to his lynx eye fixed eagerly upon it. Her heart was subdued by his cruel glance, like the dove in the talons of the hawk. Exulting over his victim, the bird of prey plunges his deadly claws and cruel beak in her, and, having already lacerated her tender frame, fixes in her breast his greedy eye, drunk with the quick gushing blood, joyful in the contemplation of her death struggles.

So poor Amalia's heart lay bare and undefended under the terrible eye of the priest. He counted its tender pulsations, every one of which he solemnly resolved should be bitterly atoned for, with as many tears of blood.

To shorten the embarrassing scene, Amalia rose and left the room to go to her grandmother.

He had already extracted from her all that he wished, and even more, so that he did not care to detain her. Indeed, he felt the necessity of being alone to indulge the fierce thoughts which were horribly rending his spirit, and to arrange his dark machinations.

CHAPTER XVI.

MORAL CONFLICT AND FATAL CRISIS.

DON GIUSEPPE retired to his own room and shut himself in.

His first sensation was that of despair and utter prostration. He, a priest, was precluded from ever daring to look with loving eyes upon a beloved face—and if he did, the glance, in others innocent, would be in him a sin, and doom him to perdition. A look of love from her could never be his. Religious and good as she was, it might before have been a perilous attempt, but not a hopeless undertaking for refined hypocrisy, to seduce the heart of the innocent maiden. But now it was impossible—now, that another love, and sinless love, filled her heart. At that thought he bounded


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from the easy chair in which he had thrown himself on entering the apartment, paced the room, and exclaimed with frenzy, "Never, never! Neither by angelic nor Satanic force can she be mine! Never will she bestow upon me one thought of affection. She loves with long standing attachment, deep rooted in her nature, and now revived with hundred-fold force—with all the violence of passion—of a sentiment that for years and years has been assimilated with her existence! And for whom does she feel this love, this overwhelming love? For one, before whose high-souled enthusiasm my head ought to bow in humility. He is not clad in these detestable garments which debase and degrade a noble nature, and which weaken and intimidate a lofty soul. He will acquire fame, honour, and glory, in the world, while I shall remain among these splendid helots, obscure, held in no esteem, except by a few imbecile bigots—by everybody else despised. Such is my portion.

His eye is fixed, with intense concentration, immovably on the ground, the pupil alternately expanding and contracting from the intensity of

his mental anguish. His lips are livid and convulsed ; his distended nostrils sending forth his gusty breath in the delirium of impotent rage. A horrible picture does he present of hate and hopeless rage. Such must Satan have been when expelled from heaven—splendid in his fallen beauty, a beauty bearing the impress of reprobation.


In the intensity of his excitement, thought fails him. The struggle of his mind overpowers his iron frame. Unable to repress his agony, and transported with the excess of rage, he bites his hands, lacerates his arms as if he would tear away the flesh, plucks up by the roots his dishevelled hair. He utters suppressed, but furious groans. His face is horribly convulsed. In this state he remains for some minutes, then overcome—breathless—he falls with his face upon the bed, and there stifles his groans. He feels himself the toy of an unclean, malicious spirit, who wills his destruction—the spirit of jealousy. Virtue feebly strives for the mastery, but Vice conquers her, and she quickly hides her face, and, trembling and despairing, takes flight.



After this fit of fury he somewhat composes himself, and seems in measure quieted. Having risen from the bed, by chance, he catches a glimpse of himself in the glass. He sees himself so changed, his face wearing such a frightful expression of rage, that he shudders at himself.

A sweet idea dawns upon him—an idea for a moment beams peace into his mind, and the sinful tempest of his heart abates for a season. To his mind recurs for a moment the sweet days of childhood, when he was yet innocent and pure, and he thinks of the soft caresses of his parents, of the love by which he was encircled when he was bright and happy—of the days when he was distinguished among his fellow-students. He thinks of his mother, whom he so dearly loved, and the recollection of her tenderness affects him deeply. He indulges for a brief instant in these gentle thoughts, as if that hard heart were softening. But suddenly, alas! a wild idea again rushes over his brain and utterly banishes this sweet, but transient calm.

He thought of the noble, the virtuous, the beloved—his rival—with whom it was useless



to strive now for precedence. He determined to pursue that course on which he had entered—the course of impiety.

What right has virtue to control him? he asks himself with Satanic pride. Was he not by a cruel father forced upon an execrable career? Did he not find himself compelled by his father's inflexibility to take vows which destroy every dear affection and enervate the mind of man? Is he to blame if in the exacerbation of his spirit and bitterness of his heart, he hates all mankind, and, with adverse interests, makes war against them—against Francesco, the most detested of them all?

In these horrible dreamings of hate, he laughs with an internal laugh of complacency. Groans mingle with his terrible laugh, which is reflected on his livid lips.

While he nourishes and caresses these atrocious thoughts, exulting in them, and yielding himself up to his dreadful fancies, an idea formidable and threatening presents itself to his sight which freezes up his life's blood—he thinks of hell—of God—of religion—of his

soul, and feels his heart writhe with the terror of desperation, not of remorse—with stubbornness, not with repentance—and he defies the tremendous wrath of God.

CHAPTER XVII.

PRELUDE AND HARMONY.

GIRLHOOD is like the spring. Nature yields its sweetest fragrance. The buds and flowers bashfully and timidly shoot forth in the meadows, and half hidden, half disclosed, come out in the trees. The tender and delicate grass is yet small, and scarcely dares to penetrate the earth, though its tints are of the most vivid green. All nature revels in gladness. Playful zephyrs float idly, fanning the tender plants with the gentle undulations of their wings. All nature is clad in gay colours. Every object wears the variegated mantle of hope.

So fly the dreamy days of the tender maiden. The sensations she experiences are not yet determined. An indistinct and vague aptitude for

love, only partially developed, invests the simple graces of immature budding life, before it knows the influence of love's maturing ray.

Amalia has passed from the opening years of life's spring time to the age which waits for love. An unknown and indistinct sentiment excites in her bosom ineffably sweet thrills, she feels her heart dilate, a vivid warmth kindling in her hitherto unconscious soul. Nature no longer laughs in gaiety to her eye, but speaks to her heart in sublime and melancholy accents, uttering the language of love. Her eye, before so vivacious and unreflecting, is now fixed and concentrated. Her smile, which was so confident and joyful, is now tinged with the lightest shade of pensiveness, and is doubly winning; the expression of her face is no longer marked by the serenity ignorant of care, nor evinces sadness, but seems wrapped in sweet pre-occupations.

Her voice utters graver and softer tones, not light, voluble notes, as heretofore.

Thus in one day is Amalia changed from her former self. She is compelled to restrain the beatings of her heart with her hand. She

experiences emotions of indefinable tenderness, moving her to weep ; tears fall not, but her eyes are moistened with love's humidity. The song of the bird no longer sounds objectless, light, and joyous to her ; it is the tender call of love, with which the fond mother summons her beloved mate. The morning air, kissing her brow, no longer produces exuberant joy and vivacity of spirits, but seems to sigh in harmony with her heart. She loves the flowers—not now the most gaudy, but those of more subdued colours and form, and more delicate odour ; these seem to possess a more mysterious signification, harmonising better with the state of her soul.

She prays, but abstractedly, though with greater enthusiasm, and her prayer ascends in sweeter fragrance, proceeding now from an impassioned heart. In the midst of her prayer a beloved earthly image keeps its steadfast place, and fearing that she is less devout, she prays more and still more ardently. Fear not, maiden ! God is your merciful Father. He placed in your breast a heart to love. He consecrated love in Eve, the mother of all, when

he gave her for a companion to Adam. God is not harsh with his creatures. He loves the loving man, and approves the tenderness of woman. He sanctified love by rites and ceremonies both under the old and new law. Fear not, dear girl, that this pure love which has entered your heart is a sin. Fear not, whatever priests may say, or rather, whatever *the priest* may say !

CHAPTER XVIII.

PERFIDIOUS SUGGESTIONS.

AT a window, overlooking a beautiful garden, sat an aged lady; a priest stood beside her. The lady appeared to be regarding some object with the most affectionate interest. The priest's eye was fixed with eager and sinister gaze. While thus occupied, the two conversed.

"How anxious my Amalia makes me! She does not seem the same being she was a few days since. How changed she is! Do you not perceive it, Don Giuseppe?"

"Yes, madam, I see it but too clearly," returned Don Giuseppe, with tremulous voice. "When she first returned from the convent she fluttered about the garden lively and gay, now plucking the flowers without motive for the

mere pleasure of crushing or scattering them—now racing with the dog and uttering childish cries of gladness; chasing the butterflies or chatting with the gardener. Every thing then amused her. But now, indeed, she is not the same! Look, your ladyship,” continued he, following up his artful observations, “how slowly and steadily she walks along the paths, plucking the flowers and distributing the colours with such thoughtful art. She rarely or never smiles, scarcely ever speaks, and when she does, her voice is softer and lower than formerly.”

Don Giuseppe’s words produced upon the Marchioness exactly the impression he desired.

“Oh, yes,” she exclaimed, “I fear her heart begins to palpitate with an affection that is felt only too early—which comes but too soon to trouble life’s tranquillity. I fear, unknown to us, she nourishes an attachment.”

At these words the bosom of the priest was oppressed with most painful sensations, and his penetrating eye assumed an indescribable expression of grief, hate, and love combined.

“Oh, yes,” continued the Marchioness, “I fear that the pure delights of girlhood

have vanished for ever. She loves, Don Giuseppe."

Don Giuseppe shuddered at the sound of these two words so casually coupled with his name. It surely was an atrocious jest of chance.

"She loves, and she has not yet confided her secret to me ; she has never said a word to me ! I trust that, at her tender age, she has made no unhappy choice. I should be glad to see her settled before I leave this world, but surely she would love a worthy object ; for she has never shown a sign, even in her girlish gaiety, of want of sense or lightness. But I do wish that she had confided to me the secret of her heart."

Don Giuseppe was greatly excited by the words of the Marchioness. A tempest agitated his heart, though it raged silently and unperceived of mortal ken. With profound dissimulation, however, he answered—

"I cannot hide my opinion from your ladyship. I firmly believe that some powerful secret cause has produced this change in Lady Amalia. The signs of it are but too evident. She has certainly lost her serenity of mind. No doubt she has conceived a violent passion, and who can

wonder, at her age? Heaven grant, inexperienced as she is, that no unworthy object may have surprised her heart."

"You frighten me, Don Giuseppe. We must watch her narrowly, and discover her secret."

"Yes, that is the only way. We must do so in order to find a remedy, in case a remedy should be required. First of all, we must know the object of this passion. Should it be one of those unworthy, thoughtless men with whom the world abounds, without principle and without fear of God—"

"I see no young man about here," said the Marchioness, "who can have made this impression upon her; but I cannot, on the other hand, account for this marked change on any other ground. What is your opinion, Don Giuseppe?"

"I could not say," answered he, as if speaking to himself. "I know of no one. Francesco Fantoni has been at home for the last few days, but I should think she has not met him—and yet, in the free coming and going that she enjoys here, it is possible that, by chance, she has met him. But I can hardly believe it. Had it

been the case, Lady Amalia would have mentioned it before this."

"I should not have objected to this attachment, although the young man is not of noble family, for I have heard him spoken of most highly. I am told that he possesses extraordinary talent, and, indeed, he gave promise of it in his childhood. But a word or two you dropped at times makes me afraid that he possesses little religion. Do tell me plainly, Don Giuseppe. You must know his character, because he was in the seminary when you were there completing your studies."

"I hope," answered he, "that Lady Amalia has not engaged her affections to a man who, I have reason to believe, is without the fear of God. At least in the seminary, although but a boy, the superiors looked upon him with suspicion, as a dangerous character, and watched him closely. If he is now what he was suspected of being then, he is certainly a bad young man, although he may enjoy the favour of the world. It is true that he may be improved now, though the university of Padua is not exactly the place to reform a young man's character, but rather

to debase a virtuous disposition. During his stay here this autumn, he has never been seen in church to attend mass. He is serious and grave, it is true, and lives quietly enough, but still he may be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

"Oh, what sad times we live in," said the old lady. "How wicked the world is getting! I shall be thankful to leave it. And if that young man is such—"

"It is only my supposition, madam."

"It is a supposition which seems only too probable. If he is the man you imagine, and, for her misfortune, my Amalia loves him, I would rather see her dead than tied to him."

"Let us hope they have not met, let us hope for the best," said the priest, finding that his insinuations had answered their purpose.

"Would you, dear Don Giuseppe, see and investigate the affair, and interrogate and counsel my poor Amalia, as a religious man and as a priest? I have not the courage. I confess my weakness. If, unfortunately, she should be indulging this passion, I should not have strength of mind to say any thing to afflict the dear child, she is so good!"

“Trust in God, Madam, in the blessed Virgin, and in our protector saints, and you will see that all will be well. Leave the affair to me. I will do all for the best. I will speak to the young lady, and question and advise her with paternal affection and prudence.”

“I trust to you implicitly, Don Giuseppe, and confide entirely in your friendship. You will, I am sure, employ your utmost zeal to find out a remedy, if it is needed. A poor old woman on the borders of the grave, and an orphan girl, are dependent upon your care.”

Having received from Don Giuseppe reiterated assurance of his solicitude and zeal, the Marchioness retired to her own room to pray.

Don Giuseppe's mind was soon actively engaged in determining upon his future operations.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MACHINE SET IN MOTION.

IN the evening the Marchioness retired to her room, being too weary to keep about.

Amalia, as was her wont, followed the Marchioness when she retired, and remained in her room about a quarter of an hour, repeating the prayers with her; then, having given an affectionate embrace, accompanied by a benediction, she returned to the room where Don Giuseppe was awaiting her. She little imagined the impatience with which he desired her return, in order to commence the edifying colloquy which he contemplated, and to which she prepared herself to listen, as usual, not only with patience, but with interest. She generally found the company of the priest very agreeable. He

had a superior mind, and the grace and elegance of his language were very striking. In addressing her, he endeavoured to colour his most severe precepts with a pervading touch of gentleness. For some time past he had exerted himself to the utmost to render his conversation still more attractive, in hopes of winning her sympathy, and teaching her to think him equally learned and agreeable. In his exhortations he insidiously instilled venom. His pictures of pure religion were painted with a flattering and impassioned colouring, calculated to inflame her mobile and plastic fancy with far other than devotional ideas, under the fallacious and seductive pretext of piety.

He endeavoured at the same time to give his instructions a somewhat severe aspect, and to tinge them with the romantic, the delicate, and the tender, without at present making them so openly voluptuous.

Upon Amalia's appearance Don Giuseppe addressed her, saying—

“I have to speak to you on a subject of great importance.”

At this intimation her heart smote her. There

is frequently within us a delicate sense teaching us intuitively that that which is in appearance harmless, may cause us danger and grief. As cattle distinguish between poisonous and wholesome herbs, and choose the wholesome and reject the bad—as various animals, from natural perception or impulse, feel sympathy or aversion for each other—as plants attach themselves one to another, reciprocating their sap, and mutually assisting to propagate their kind; or conceive an aversion the one for the other, so that if one be placed in too close proximity to another, it will turn aside its roots to escape the hated contact, and, if its enemy be not removed, will fade, sicken, and die—so, by natural instinct, without being able to offer a reason, the young girl shrunk from opening her mind to the priest, and declaring her love.

Amalia stands before Don Giuseppe. She tries to appear at ease and indifferent, though unsuccessfully. He assumes an appearance of paternal affection; and he does it successfully. He commenced in caressing but firm tones.

“This evening, Lady Amalia, I have to perform rather an extraordinary office. It is my

duty to assist you in examining your conscience, and finding out what is passing in your dear little heart."

The dear little heart was now beating at a furious rate.

"Oh, Don Giuseppe, are you fond of joking? I have nothing to tell that you do not know." She was perhaps nearer the truth than she suspected. "Nothing extraordinary is passing in my heart, and I cannot believe that the little fancies of a poor girl's brain can be of any interest to you."

She spoke jestingly, but her voice trembled and bare witness to her internal agitation.

"I can readily believe that nothing extraordinary is passing within you; what should there be extraordinary? Every one sees what your occupations are, and how you pass your time. But the Marchioness is uneasy about you, and entreats me to ask you some questions in order to extract from you your secret, if you have one. I can but feel for the poor old lady. She loves you so dearly that she is always anxious about you. Her importunity arises from excessive love, mine from my obligation to obey

her. But never mind, it is all simple enough. It will suffice for me to tell her that I have spoken to you. But would you believe it, Lady Amalia? the Marchioness is continually repeating, 'I am sure my Amalia has something on her mind that troubles her, something extraordinary that she will not or dare not tell—something that she knows is not right.' I have repeatedly said to her, 'How can your ladyship think such a thing? Can you believe that your granddaughter would nourish a thought in her mind that she would not express? Sure Lady Amalia is incapable of it. I know her too well. She is so good and simple-hearted and sincere.'"

Amalia becomes crimson. She feels the commendation of the priest as a reproof, and her conscience reproaches her.

"Notwithstanding all I can say," continued Don Giuseppe, "she persists in her notion, and says that within a few days you are so changed that you are not like yourself. Indeed, I myself notice a great difference. Perhaps you are not well?"

"No, not very. I have—a headache."

"Then I may tell the Marchioness she is mistaken, and that it is your health."

"Oh, no, I am quite well; do not make her uneasy."

"Well then, am I to tell her that the change she laments is caused by a little fit of love? Ha, ha, ha!"

"*No, not a little...*"

"A great one then? You do love somebody, eh?"

"I said it was not a little fit, but I did not say it was a great one, Don Giuseppe," said poor Amalia, trembling.

"But, Lady Amalia, you place me in a dilemma. Look."

"Yes, sir."

"I really begin to think that the Marchioness is not wrong, and that you are in love, my poor girl. But I hope that you will not have to blush for your choice; that you love some steady, virtuous youth, some religious man."

"Yes, he is good and virtuous, everybody says so. Everybody says he is the best in the place."

"And who is the youth?"

"Signor Francesco Fantoni," said she, in low and hesitating tones.

"Signor Francesco Fantoni," replied the priest solemnly, but neither hastily nor severely. "Signor Fantoni! Answer me truly and sincerely. Do you really love him? Could you conquer your passion?"

"Oh, impossible! impossible!" exclaimed she, with energy. "I have loved him from a child. He has never been out of my thoughts, I have always prayed for him. I asked the father confessor of the convent if I might pray for him, and he said I might if my prayer was sincere, and incited by religious motives, and not mixed with evil thoughts." (Thus do the priests insinuate the first ideas of evil thoughts in the minds of young girls.) "I prayed for him quite innocently, for I did not know that I loved him so much as I now find I do. Everybody loves him, and it is natural that I should love him better than any one else, he was so good to me! He was the companion of my childhood!"

"You have seen him then," said Don Giuseppe with the severity of a censor, accompany-

ing his words by a smile of bitterness, showing that his breast was overflowing with gall.

"Yes," answered Amalia, tremblingly.

"Where?"

"At the Countess Belfiore's."

"When?"

"The day before yesterday."

"Then they were not alone," said he, in tones of reproach, as if to upbraid her with falsehood.

"They were alone for half-an-hour when I first went."

"What did he say to you?"

"Nothing that was wrong."

"But what?"

"That he had never forgotten the bright days of our early friendship—that he loved me now as much as then, and more."

"And what did you say? I suppose you were silent."

"Yes."

"Did he take your hand?"

"Yes."

"Did he press it?"

"Yes."

"But you did not return his pressure?"

"Yes."

"But without manifesting a return of affection?"

"Oh! I could not help doing that; my heart swam with a delight I never felt before."

Her words were torture to the priest; however, he continued his interrogations.

"Have you seen him since?"

"No."

"Have you thought about him much?"

"Continually."

"Have you tried to banish the thought?"

"Never. On the contrary, I have sought to be alone, that I might dwell upon it."

"And did you not think you were committing a sin?"

"I almost feared so, but still I hoped not."

"Why?"

"Because I thought God would not disapprove of my love."

A silence of some moments followed. Don Giuseppe seemed the judge, Amalia the delinquent.

Presently he approaches her with a solemn step,

when she with almost childish petulance, yet with a show of resolution, says :

“ Well, I do love him, and what then ? Cannot I share his lot ? Ought I not to be proud to call myself his ? Will the holy church oppose the contraction of a holy bond ?—”

And she was proceeding, and would, perhaps, in the heat of the moment, have shaken off the yoke which the priest had pressed upon her neck, but he, with an air of hypocritical compassion, cried,

“ Do you know who it is for whom you thus openly declare your love ?”

“ A noble young man, universally esteemed.”

“ He is an infidel.”

At these words a dreadful shudder seized the over-excited girl, who felt herself annihilated at one blow. The word infidel fell like a thunder-clap upon her brain. It conveyed to her the idea that he was hopelessly lost—condemned to eternal torments. Her face became overshadowed with the pallor of death. “ My Francesco an infidel !” she exclaimed wildly. “ Saints and angels, give me courage and strength to support the blow, it is too terrible !”

“Yes, an unbeliever,” cried Don Giuseppe; “he believes in neither the saints nor the Virgin, and very likely not in our divine Redeemer either. Will you, unhappy girl, unite your lot with that of such a wretch? You, an angel of paradise, will you consent to give yourself away to a condemned sinner?”

Here the poor girl burst into a flood of tears.

“I do not ask you to believe my words alone, but to listen to facts. Ask anybody in the neighbourhood if he was ever seen in church, if he ever goes to mass, if he lives like a Christian, or shows the least sign of being one.”

“Then he whom I believed so good and virtuous—” her words were interrupted by convulsive sobs: but having quieted herself a little, she continued, “he to whom I had given my whole heart—the beloved companion of my early years—he is then a wicked man, without fear of God, and I—and I love this man with the whole strength of my being. Oh, holy Virgin! Mother of God! Have pity upon me! Have pity upon him, and touch his heart!”

“Oh yes,” answered Don Giuseppe, as if deeply affected, “oh, yes, pray to the Father of

Mercies on his behalf. Pray to the blessed Virgin that she may intercede for him. Beseech the saints in paradise, that he may be made worthy of your love. I too will fervently pray ; and if grace should be given him to repent of his ways, I will do all in my power that his wishes may be crowned, and that your love may be satisfied. But mind, Amalia, while he remains in his present state, a good Christian like you, a pious soul, must not think of him. I tell you plainly, with tears in my eyes, you cannot even think of him without sin. You would not, my daughter, embitter the last days of your poor grandmother, by indulging in a profane and sinful affection. You would hasten her end, and she would descend into the tomb without bestowing upon you her parting benediction ; and without her blessing you would never again know peace as long as you lived. Pray, and pray unceasingly, to the good Jesus, our Saviour, and he will give you strength to resist temptation. It is Satan himself who tempts you with this ardent love for this wicked man."

" Oh, no ! I will never afflict my kind grand-

mother. I will conquer this unhappy affection, though I should die. I will tear it from my heart. But, gr'acious heaven—I shall die!”

“Oh, do not say so, my dear daughter. God gives strength to those who confide in him, and in me you will always find a friend to counsel you, to guide you, and to receive your confidence with true paternal affection. You may confide all your troubles to me.”

The weeping girl, in her frenzy of desperation, took his hand and passionately kissed it, bathing it with her tears, as if he were the angel of goodness. At the contact of her lips with his hand, fire seemed to pervade his veins. He felt himself burning—in flames. With almost superhuman force he contrived, however, to restrain this all but uncontrollable transport, which would have betrayed his real character, and banished him ignominiously from the house. The moment of his delirium past, he resolved to turn his excitement to religious account. As if he could no longer restrain his pious emotions, he placed his hands upon her head, and, with a show of paternal affection, gazed at her with de-

vouring eyes, while she believed that his regard was merely one of compassion.

"Courage, my Amalia," said he, "courage;" and hastily quitting the apartment, left her in a state of deadly anguish. With precipitate steps he gained his own room.

The following day the Marchioness interrogated Don Giuseppe with the utmost interest. He rendered her an account embellished to suit his own views. He thought it prudent that she should not mention the subject to Amalia for a few days, for he feared lest a tender confidence should weaken the resolution of the Marchioness, and that the plans he was laying should be disconcerted.

At table all passed quietly, but sadly. The Marchioness fixed an eye of intense affection on her grandchild, and addressed her more kindly and tenderly than ever. Amalia tried to appear the same as usual, but her tremulous voice so much lower and more touching, the significant sadness of her eye, and, from time to time, the falling of a furtive tear, denoted the suffering of her mind.

The priest made every effort to render the

conversation cheerful, to infuse life into it, but in vain. His amiability and instructive conversation only seemed to sadden the ladies still more. He changed his tactics, was quiet, sedate, and even melancholy; but he carefully sought to keep their minds occupied with touching on various topics, religious and secular. He feared silence, lest in an outburst of tenderness on either side, the subject should be introduced.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MACHINE CONTINUES TO REVOLVE.

UNTIL Francesco had returned to college, Don Giuseppe desired that things should continue enveloped in mystery and remain in suspense. But it was necessary to watch Amalia, in order to prevent a meeting with Francesco, and keep her constantly occupied, that she might not have time to wander abroad. For this purpose she was called early in the morning to listen to a long sermon. Then followed mass, then litany, and then meditation. His object in thus occupying her in religious duties was two-fold. He wished to keep her engrossed with arguments and subjects apt to excite her imagination. For disposed as she was to enthusiastic excess, both by her vivacious and impulsive character, and by

her convent education, the liveliness of religious impressions would be calculated to weaken the impression Francesco had made upon her ; while further, these various devotional observances would prevent her leaving the house, because retirement is an especial condition of the spiritual exercises. The other object that he had in view, was to alarm her with discourses prepared for the purpose. The darkened room, the lachrymose and sepulchral tones of the preacher, the doctrines he laid down, which, so far from revealing the consoling, simple, and gentle truths of the divine code, were made the vehicle for intimidating her spirit—the narration of strange fancies, imagined in the barbarous ages by ignorant and superstitious monks, their dreamy horrors augmented by the deception and fanaticism of succeeding centuries—stories of condemned spirits returning to earth under horrible aspects, to render an account of their sufferings, surrounded by fire, and emitting flames from nose, eyes, and mouth, their torments resembling those to which she was subjecting herself in nourishing her sinful love, and which would be the portion of Francesco hereafter ;—such were the means he used to

accomplish his object. He represented unclean spirits in every variety of form, wearing angelic appearances, artfully alluding to her tempter, who, though a demon, appeared to her transformed as an angel of light.

“Can he be a demon disguised?” asked poor Amalia in her agitation. The wicked priest believed not his own infamous tales, but she too surely gave credence to them. By means of these exercises he succeeded in exciting the utmost terror in her breast. He alarmed her about the state of her soul, and caused her to think with fear and trembling of her love as condemned of heaven—as a crime—and to believe that unless she fought against it with all her might, and overcame it, her soul would be lost, and she would perish eternally. But still, in spite of all, she found it impossible to tear his image from her heart. If she could renounce the idea of seeing him again, she could not stifle or conquer her affection for him. She prayed more and more fervently, devoted herself more completely to exercises, offered the most solemn promises to God that

she would not dwell upon the idea of his love ; but all without avail.

In the mean time, the few remaining days of the vacation drew to a close, and Francesco was surprised and disappointed that he saw no more of Amalia. He gazed anxiously at the windows of the habitation which contained his treasure ; but they were always deserted.

CHAPTER XXI.

THERE ARE GOOD AMONG THE EVIL, AS WELL
AS EVIL AMONG THE GOOD.

THE parish church of Rivalta was situated about half a mile distant from the residence of the Marchioness. The priest of the church, Don Domenico, was one of the best and pleasantest men in the world. He was born of humble parents, who lived in the country, but whose circumstances, for their position in life, were comfortable.

There is nothing more common in Italy, than for a humble agriculturist, who has a numerous family, to make priests of one or two of his sons, or even more. It is a natural ambition on the part of a father, and is one of the readiest means of securing a competence for his

son, and of seeing him treated as a gentleman among gentlemen. The chosen one among several brothers is proud of his exaltation. He feels it an honour to quit the spade and plough, to soil his hands no longer with cultivating the ground, and to launch forth in a new career, with the prospect of a rich living.

Now Don Domenico was placed in a seminary by his father, and he made great progress in his studies. He was of a cheerful disposition, and greatly beloved by his companions. He made no ostentatious display of piety, but was sincerely religious, and his conduct was altogether irreproachable. He was noticed by the Bishop, who esteemed him highly, and under his auspices he studied theology. When he became a priest his family had the satisfaction of seeing him in the enjoyment of a good benefice. He was a dutiful son, and not ashamed of his parentage, like too many of the priests. His father visited him at will with a freedom that did equal credit to both.

When gentlemen from the neighbouring city came to the priest's house to enjoy a game at cards, he did not hide his father as if ashamed

of him, and those who did not choose to sit at the table with him were given to understand that their visits could be dispensed with. He would not allow his father to be placed at another and lower table than himself; and so great were the favour and esteem which the blameless conduct of the priest inspired, that the count and the nobleman disdained not frequently to take a seat beside this fortunate father.

The manners of the priest were free and somewhat blunt, but his habits were those of the strictest propriety. His conversation was unstudied and pleasing. Though slightly inclining to satire, it never degenerated into evil speaking, while he freely applied the lash to the openly vicious. His sayings were acute, and if a little inclining to be rough, were full of spirit and humour. His dress, if not over-neat and particular, but rather rustic, was always proper, though he would never wear the long coat reaching almost to the ground, and the three-cornered hat, commonly used by priests, except as regarded the coat, while celebrating the services of the church.


He was not, it is true, of that excessively

melancholy and rigidly sanctimonious turn of mind which gains for some priests the reputation of uncanonized saints; but he was a man of irreproachable and dignified conduct, and was strict in his belief of the Roman Catholic prejudices; for the superstitions instilled with our education frequently obscure good sense. However, in him superstition wore its most bearable aspect, mitigated, as it was, by good faith, and not covered with the pharisaical mantle of pretended devotion.

He was always ready to assist his parishioners with his counsel, which was most judicious, and to succour them when necessary. He visited the poor at their own houses, offering them consolation. He was the pacificator in domestic disputes, without ever obtruding himself officiously or unasked. If called to the sick bed by day or night, whether at table or engaged in study, he was always ready to obey the summons to give spiritual consolation. He never hesitated to traverse mountains, face cold or heat, cross marshes and bogs, and undertake the most fatiguing journeys, for his parish was large and inconveniently situated. His were true consolations.

He took no advantage of those moments of terror which are frequently aggravated, for lucre's sake, by the priest, to obtain large legacies and suffrages; but he endeavoured to mitigate the sufferings of the sick with true, solid, and disinterested solace; such as was a support for the good in accomplishing the great journey, and an incentive to repentance for the hardened sinner.

It was characteristic that he performed his duties in an unstudied manner bordering on roughness. He availed not himself of those ejaculations, those sighs, those husky tones, and that solemn grimace which are looked upon so often as appertaining of necessity to the office of a priest, and more especially a Roman Catholic priest. But though his manner might be slightly careless and indifferent, it was less the effect of negligence or want of interest than of temperament. His parishioners made all due allowance for this little failing, and his name was everywhere coupled with benedictions.



CHAPTER XXII.

A THEOLOGICAL STUDENT.

A YOUNG clerk was in the habit of going very frequently to the house of the priest. He was the son of honest parents, who had a large family, but who were poor, and found their means very limited, and their burdens increasing. The family thought of making the eldest boy a priest, because he would be able to afford them some assistance when he began to say mass. The lad was of a gentle disposition, and seemed admirably adapted to the sacerdotal calling; indeed, it was rather his own choice than that of his parents. He had a natural tendency to quiet, and, while still a child, almost always avoided the noisy recreations of those of his own age. He loved to attend church, and be permitted to

perform various little offices there, such as carrying the surplice and the candles, holding the collecting-box and receiving the alms; performing, in short, the office of a little sacristan. He recited prayers unceasingly. He spoke little, seldom smiled, and lectured his young acquaintances because they did not imitate his example, instead of following their own childish occupations. His family resided very near to the church, and the boy was immediately under the eye of the priest, who was so pleased with his activity in the services, that he determined to enrol him in the sacerdotal ranks. He sent him, therefore, to the seminary at his own expense, and at the time that we make his acquaintance, the youth was pretty well advanced in learning, but he was much more conspicuous for his religious melancholy. He had commenced his theological studies, and now the priest had him very often at his house, and at his meals, respecting him greatly for his steadiness and sincerity.

The village being only about two miles distant from the town, he walked to his studies early every morning, and returned in the evening, his

benefactor arranging with a pious family to give him his dinner for charity. Thus he seemed in the way of becoming an exemplary member of his profession. His family rejoiced in his good fortune, and his neighbours looked upon him as an object of envy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MAGICAL EFFECTS OF BENEDICTIONS.

It was a festival day, the third day of Easter, of the year in which our story commences. The priest of Rivalta had two or three intimate friends to dine with him from the neighbouring town, and among them was the clerk whom he befriended and protected. During the repast, Don Domenico was summoned by one of his parishioners who wanted a blessing for his cow, which was dangerously ill. It lay in the stall moaning and suffering, and no one could tell what ailed it. The priest is required in haste, that, in surplice and stole, and with the ritual in his hand, and with holy water, and aspersion, he may exorcise the evil by his sacred benediction.

It is true the distance was but short, but he would be compelled to absent himself from his guests for half an hour at least, which, for the sake of a mere superstition, was anything but agreeable. He and his friends were equally annoyed, but he could not refuse, lest he should lose favour with his parishioners, and get into trouble with the clerical court for deviating from prescribed rules. He went, therefore, though certainly against his will, and not without grumbling. He had given orders that the dinner should proceed without him, and the guests continued their repast, though so slowly, from politeness, that on his return he found that they had only dismissed one course during his absence, and were now engaged upon the second. This was a matter of little moment in so plentiful a feast, and the priest quickly made up for lost time.

The guests, however, loudly complained of the troublesome benediction, and expressed aversion for such superstitions. The priest would not wholly concur with them, but still his own faith in their efficacy seemed not over-deep. He remarked that the credulity of the poor

people was carried to such an excess, that they would have their cattle blessed, their poultry, and their cabbages, and Nonna Margherita's cat even must be blessed, if it mewed at all strangely, for fear that it should prove to be the devil, in "feline form."

"These benedictions," added he, "give us plenty to do, and peril our reputation. One priest is celebrated for curing animals and men with his benediction ; another for curing babies of convulsions, and old men of the gout ; another for increasing the failing supply of milk of the mothers of the family, whether in the house or in the stall. Some, who have loud voices and herculean limbs, with mystic words and devout crossings, conjure the storm. Should the experiment prove unsuccessful, the priest is suspected, maligned, and accused, and it is considered altogether his fault that the charm fails. I very much condemn those priests," concluded he, "who for the sake of a few eggs, a pound or two of butter, or a little money, encourage the superstition of the people, which is already excessive in this respect. I avoid it whenever I can but if I opposed it too resolutely, I should

lose ground in public opinion, so that I am obliged to submit against my better judgment."


His guests agreed with the priest, and they came to the conclusion that the benedictions were very absurd. Nevertheless, no one ventured to assert that they were altogether useless, or wholly inefficacious, whatever their inward opinion was, seeing that they were authorized by the church, and form part of its rites.

The clerk listened and kept silence, without raising his eyes. The following morning he went to the seminary as usual, and was in the room of the Rector, who was also Canon and Vicar-General. The Rector was one of those ill-favoured men who are found among the many excessively ugly priests and friars. Numbers enter the church simply because they despair of making their way in the world in consequence of their revolting plainness. Men so plain are so rarely met with among laymen, that uncomeliness may be considered a characteristic of the gentlemen of the cloth.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A JEWEL IN THE RANKS OF THE HIERARCHY.

THE age of the Vicar General might be fifty or sixty, though he looked much older, but he was stout, robust, and of an iron constitution. He was bald with the exception of a few white hairs which stood up bristly like thorns upon a rock. His head was enormously large, and his cranium knotted and irregular. The organs of destructiveness and cruelty must have been very amply developed, for it would have been difficult to believe that those enormous protuberances (harmonizing wonderfully with that grim countenance) could indicate gentle and holy dispositions. His nostrils were widely distended over his very wide face, which resembled the big *bas*



reliefs ornamenting the portals of ancient palaces. He had large yellow eyes of cruel and cunning expression, like those of a hyena. Numerous small semicircular wrinkles, running at the corners of the eyes, as if they were enclosed by a parenthesis, seemed to impart to the look a malicious and astute smile. Several deeply-indented horizontal lines crossed his forehead, and these, with the practice of perpetually raising his eyebrows, gave him a vulgar expression of cruelty and low cunning. His teeth were large, black, and irregular; his lips underwent the most unpleasant contortions every time he spoke, not from a convulsive movement, but only from habit. His skin was rough, and like leather. His right leg and arm were shorter than the left, and a limping gait added to the grace of this type of priestly beauty.

Nor is it without reason that we use the expression "type of priestly beauty," for he was the favourite of the women, who looked upon him as little short of an angel newly arrived from paradise. For a Roman Catholic priest to be ugly—monstrous even—is a sure passport to the favour of womankind. The ladies

of Lunaco—not only the decrepit and lame, hysterical, yellow-visaged old maids, and devotees “*de trente ans*,” who, in religious orgasm, piously exclaim, “Ah ! Eh ! Oh !” with doting fervour ; and the Jesuit doctresses, who add feminine to jesuitical art to make a more subtle compound of deceit and hypocrisy ; but also the young, worldly and fair—were all his ardent admirers, and devoted to him heart and soul. Often enough the uncouth visage of the Rector was gladdened by the sweet languishing glance of pious beauty, and his ugly mal-formed hand impressed with the burning kisses of amorous women inflamed with love—spiritual love—love sanctified by the sanctity of its object. This is a faithful picture from life, being in this instance far from any pretension to idealism.

It is necessary to have been in Roman Catholic countries, and within the walls of Roman Catholic churches, to believe how many *fac similes* of our handsome Rector may be found among other rectors, priests, friars, prelates, and cardinals.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CHRISTIAN SPY.

THIS gowned, purple-clad, be-ringed, adorned—he was studied and ostentatious in his attire—Lojolesque and tonsured dignitary, was in his room in the seminary, benignant in aspect, radiant with a smile of heavenly grimace, in which it was difficult to say which predominated—the lewd suavity of the baboon, or the malignant hardness of Satan.

His gaze was fixed upon a poor clerk, who, with pale face, his arms hanging by his side, his head drooping, and his heart trembling, stood before him. The lad was the *protégé* of the priest of Rivalta, of whom we have already spoken. The Rector's naturally harsh voice, in

addressing him was repressed and veiled by a hypocritical intonation, which made it more than usually unpleasing. Continuing the conversation, "My son," said he, "you are under obligations to the good priest of Rivalta, it is true. He is a man of excellent heart, and is very good to you; but you are under still more solemn obligations to God. If the priest has his failings, you ought to be the one to hide and excuse them, that is only right; but if his doctrines are opposed to the truth, and if the maxims which he pronounces are not pure, you ought to tell me, now, as a friend, only from a feeling of charity towards your fellow-creatures—towards you—towards him—for the good of your own soul, and his, and others! You have informed me, like a good Christian as you are, of many other things relating to him, which I have frequently remedied, without doing him any harm, or exposing you, and all for the glory of God. I esteem your excellent priest very highly, as you know. He is a man of unblameable conduct, only he sometimes expresses erroneous doctrines, which are pernicious and contrary to our holy faith, as it was given by Jesus

Christ, and interpreted by His Holiness, and the mother church, and we ought to do all in our power for the good of his soul ; and as he is your benefactor, you, above all others, ought to be ready to do so, when you have the opportunity."

Tremulously, and almost unintelligibly, the lad answered : " But, Monsignore, I am afraid it would not be right to report all that passed in my benefactor's house."

" What are you talking about, my son ? That is not reporting ; it is being active and vigilant, to prevent a man from being seduced by temptation, and falling. Listen, my son. I receive from you a communication under the seal of confession ; you can speak openly, you know how I love Don Domenico, and what you tell me will never be breathed to a creature. We only want to act together to save him—you know, my son,—to save him from perdition. You are under an obligation to tell me all. If you do not tell me everything faithfully, you peril your soul, as well as that of your benefactor. From a mistaken feeling of respect, would you wish both to perish ? I would save

you both. If you only speak, you will be safe ; you will prove yourself a true Christian, and you will have assisted in the salvation of a precious soul."

"But I feel the greatest unwillingness to repeat what was said at table yesterday ; it seems to me like treason," said the poor boy, trembling and pale, and thus innocently accusing his benefactors.

"Oh, my son, this repugnance is a false sentiment inspired by the tempter. It is the same repugnance that a sinner feels against telling his faults to the confessor, and by keeping silence he commits sacrilege and condemns himself. You must conquer this temptation ; it is a duty, a solemn obligation of religion and humanity. The salvation, not only of one soul is in question, but many others that are in danger of being drawn aside by false doctrine." Approaching the half-persuaded, half-frightened lad, and raising his voice solemnly, he said, "Speak, my son, I command you—God commands you by me. Would you resist the voice of God?"

"Oh, no !" he answered, with the most pro-

found grief, but as if determined to overcome his feelings. "Oh, no, I will tell you all. I know very well that I ought."

And with uncertain voice and trembling tongue, he told all, listening to the seductive words of the Rector, instead of the voice of conscience.

Such are the innocent spies of the Ecclesiastical Court !

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANGER RESTS NOT IN A NOBLE BREAST.

ONE morning, while Don Domenico was engaged in his room, reciting the breviary with perfect sincerity of faith and scrupulous exactitude, his servant and housekeeper—who held only the position in his service warranted by the strictest observance of his vows—knocked at the door, saying, “Signor Padrone, a letter.”

“Give it me here,” replied he. Finishing his psalm, he took it, saw that it was from the Episcopal Court, opened it and read,

“To the most Reverend Priest of Rivalta.

“For reasons moving his mind thereunto, Monsignore the Bishop of Lunaco orders the Episcopal Court to inform the most Rev. Priest

of Rivalta, that he desires that he, the said priest, will retire into the convent of the Capuchins of Sassetto, to perform his spiritual exercises there, beginning from the — day of —. Monsignore the Bishop hopes that the said most Rev. Priest will willingly ('willingly!' murmured the poor man between his teeth), and with a humble spirit of piety and obedience, retire to the afore-named convent, that his soul may be profited by the holy exercise ('hypocrites all! bishop, curials, and rector'), and that he may return to his cure with a humble and devout spirit, purified from the sins which he may have contracted through the snares of Satan, and confirmed in the faith by mortification and prayer ('the infamous Jesuit,' exclaimed he apostrophizing the Rector, from whom, as Vicar-General, he had received the letter). Monsignore the Bishop, in anticipation of the holy exercises, bestows upon the most Rev. the Priest of Rivalta his paternal Benediction ('he is welcome to keep his benedictions to himself').

"The Vicar-General,

"N. N."

From the Episcopal Court of Lunaco, this — day of April, 184—.

“ P.S.—In the meantime Don Giuseppe Lanzini will receive orders to attend to the cure of the parish with full powers.”

The good man was sorely annoyed and perplexed. He threw the letter aside in disgust, and paced the apartment with long strides for a quarter of an hour, revolving in his head thoughts of wrath and indignation, and feeling half disposed to rebel against authority, and to protest against the command. But if he refused, he knew it would be worse, and that he should excite a storm. It is an inevitable necessity to obey such intimations ; the slightest hesitation is construed into rebellion, and rebellion entails the most severe chastisement, so that he resolved finally to submit quietly. What can it mean ? he asked himself, racking his brain to discover the motive that could have induced the court to commit this act of tyranny. From the tenor of the letter, he judged that it was occasioned by the expression of some doctrine not considered quite orthodox ; but he could not call any such to mind, forgetting the conversation about the benedictions. If even he had expressed anything at all of the

kind, he could not divine how it should come under the notice of the court. No one about him seemed likely to act the part of spy. They were all affectionate and simple. The clerk? Oh, not for a moment; he was incapable of an action so black—and yet the artifices of the Episcopal Court can make black seem white, and white black. But no, he would not believe it, nor did he conceive it possible that anybody in the world would find anything of which to accuse him. In such reflections he forgot his breviary, and went into the kitchen—the priest's place of recreation and diversion—to occupy his mind with other matters; wisely determining to submit to his lot with good humour. Seated in his large chair in the spacious chimney-corner, enjoying the warmth of a good fire, his troubled brow gradually grew calm and serene as his conscience, and he said to himself that a fortnight would soon be past. He then proceeded to give orders for his departure, which was fixed for the following day.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BETTER INSPIRATIONS OF A DELUDED MIND.

IN the mean time, the compunctions of conscience which the poor clerk endured were most intense. He tried to persuade himself that he had only done his duty, but still his conscience upbraided him unceasingly, for having thus betrayed the priest's hospitality. It was in vain that he represented to himself that he had only done right ; he could not feel easy. His conduct appeared to his eyes in its natural deformity, when bereft of the sophisms of the Rector and placed at the bar of common sense and natural justice. The poor lad was so tortured with his self-upbraidings, that peace fled from him entirely. He could not confess, because, by

one of Satan's wiles, the Rector was his confessor.

Such are the ways of the Clerical Court and the Seminaries ! Those men, so active for evil, choose their spies and tale-bearers from among their own penitents. It is enough simply to state this fact, to show its abominable and flagrant immorality. The lad could not then look to his confessor for counsel—but the subject occupied his mind so fully, and the better part of his nature so far regained the ascendancy, that a light, certainly from on high, enabled him to see the error into which he had fallen. He felt the infamy of his conduct, and was persuaded that even his good faith could not justify him in acting as he did ; he saw plainly the device of his suborner, and he went in haste to the priest's house, to make the best amends in his power.

There he heard all as soon as he entered ; for, having no fault to conceal, the priest did not wish to hide what had occurred. The poor clerk was seized with a violent trembling, and presented so piteous an aspect, that the priest

asked him, with the utmost solicitude, what was the matter, and whether he felt ill. The lad said no, but that he desired to speak with him apart. The priest took him to his own room, where he entreated for pardon with clasped hands, and narrated all that had passed between him and the Rector.

The priest listened to him most patiently, and assured him of his full pardon. He told him that he did not blame him, but the man who had counselled him to the treason under the pretence of glorifying God. He thanked God, who had given him to distinguish between good and evil. He should not at all regret, he said, going to submit to the mortification of the convent, if it were the means of causing the youth to repent of an error committed under the influence of seduction and malevolence. He told him that his confession raised him higher than ever in his esteem, and concluded by assuring him that he would never abandon him.

The clerk could never more be induced to say a word against his benefactor. The Rector, in consequence, conceived such an aversion

against him, that he persecuted him in every possible manner, so that the priest resolved to remove him from the Seminary and send him to another, in a different diocese.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PROGRESS OF THE MACHINE ARRESTED—
THE CLEVER ENGINEER SETS IT IN MOTION
AGAIN.

DON GIUSEPPE received a letter expressed in the following terms :

“To the Reverend Don Giuseppe Lanzini.

“The Most Reverend Priest of Rivalta being about to absent himself from his Parish, for spiritual purposes, for the space of fifteen days, commencing from the — day of —, Don Giuseppe Lanzini is commanded to supply his place for the said period of fifteen days, for the administration of the Sacraments and the performance of all parochial duties.

“From the Clerical Court of Lunaco, this — day of —, 184—. (Signed) The Vicar-General,
“N. N.”

This order occasioned Don Giuseppe an unlooked-for interruption to his plans. In consequence of this mandate, new duties devolved upon him, for the performance of which he would be obliged to absent himself from the house from time to time. He must of necessity remit the exercises by which he had for some days kept the mind of Amalia occupied and subjugated. Don Giuseppe might in a single day lose the fruit of all his clever manœuvres ; one day might afford Amalia the opportunity of meeting Francesco, speaking to him and nullifying his attempts to keep them asunder.

But he could not refuse his consent to the court, for he well knew that when the episcopal court issues an order it will be obeyed. Besides, he had no excuse to offer ; and further, he did not really desire to refuse, for the idea of enjoying the right to command for a fortnight, tempted him. This ambition had slept, but was not extinguished, and he did not wish to lose this brief triumph. All that he could do, therefore, was to endeavour to keep Amalia occupied in her serious duties, and to induce the Marchioness to retain her niece about her as much as

possible until the departure of Francesco ; who was to quit his father's country residence in the evening of the following day, having to be at Padua in three days. This piece of intelligence, which somewhat relieved his anxiety, Don Giuseppe gained from a lad in the service of the Fantoni family, whom he met accidentally when he went to receive the office books and instructions for his new duties in the parish of Rivalta.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SACRIFICES OFFERED FOR THE SPLINTER OF
A BONE.

THE priest of Rivalta departed for the convent, and Don Giuseppe assumed his office *pro tem.* The following day he was to perform Mass at the parish church in honour of some saint of whom the church possessed a relic—a tiny piece of one of his bones ; it was to be exhibited for public adoration, as having formed part of the *physique* of the said saint ; though that it had ever belonged to a human being was at least problematical, and, indeed, it might just as well have belonged to a dog, or any other of the inferior animals, as to a man. The Marchioness remained at home, deprived of the privilege of Mass, because the precious relic demanded it on

this occasion. The people flocked to church with far more devotion than when the service was in honour of God.

Don Giuseppe having to leave for this purpose, determined to quit the house early in the morning, in order to leave Amalia asleep, that she might not express a wish to go. It was the last morning; Francesco was to depart in the evening. But Amalia had already risen. The poor girl could not sleep, and at night the emotion, suppressed during the day, awoke with increased vehemence. The sun scarcely rose, therefore, ere she gladly quitted her couch, which was to her a bed of thorns, and sought to escape her solitary terrors, alarmed at the rebellious assaults which her heart was continually making. In such a sad condition of mental agony she found herself on this morning, and still more harassing, because she experienced a strong pre-sentiment of evil. It seemed to her that some terrible calamity was hanging over her.

The bell begins to toll for the service. "What is that so early?" she asks.

"Don Giuseppe is going to say Mass," was the reply.

“ Beg Don Giuseppe to delay the preparations a little, for I wish to attend Mass.”

He would have opposed her going out, but he could find no excuse. He wished to wait for her that they might go together to the church ; but Mass being already announced by the bell, he was obliged to go to commence preparations. “ But it is so early,” thought he, “ there can be no danger of their meeting at this hour.” And he gave orders to the lady’s maid to accompany her young mistress as he could not wait, and set off alone for the church. He did not feel easy, however, he scarcely knew why ; but he, too, felt a presentiment of calamity.

CHAPTER XXX.

REMINISCENCES.

At the moment that Amalia and the servant were leaving the house, the Marchioness rang her bell. The maid-servant went to answer the summons, and as it was getting late, Amalia set out alone, fearing lest the service should have commenced. The distance to the church was about half a mile, and the path lay through pleasant lanes and beautifully wooded scenery. The air was sweet, the morning most splendid; Nature was clad in the beauty of spring time. Amalia inhaled the fresh air with delight, and felt it reinvigorate her oppressed heart. Gentle thoughts solaced her mind, and she gladly caressed and encouraged them.

She sees the spots which awake such charm-

ing associations within her breast. Here they met together—Francesco and she—in the days of innocence, when he was, oh ! how different from his present self—when he was an angel ! “There is the spot where we disported so gaily ! In this place we used to sit when he related to me our childish stories. Here we gathered flowers and made beautiful bouquets. Here we partook of our gay and cheerful refectations, consisting of the first ripe fruits, which he was ever solicitous to procure for me. Here is the tree to whose top he would climb to gather for me its rare productions. A branch broke once, and he fell at the peril of his life for my sake !”

Her bosom swelled under the influence of these tender recollections.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHICH WILL SEEM SHORT TO THE SENSITIVE
HEART.

AMALIA had scarcely walked half way to the church, when she saw some one approaching her with a book in his hand. She looked with alarm. It was Francesco. He had not yet observed her; he was still immersed in his book. She took another path, and hoped—or feared—to pass unobserved. But her hope or fear was vain. He saw her, and rushed towards her with the uncontrollable impetuosity of affection.

“Oh, my angel! Do you fly me? Wherefore? Listen to the words of your Francesco—the words which he who loves you so dearly utters. Listen to the words of love which from my heart I address to you. This evening I go

away. Let me not go away disconsolate. Let me not leave without one adieu. One adieu from you would make me blessed for a century—would sound like grateful harmony to my heart, which would ever respond to it with delicious emotion.”

Oh! how inconceivably sweet fell the accents of the youthful lover on the ears of Amalia. The tones of his voice are a song-breathing melody of angels to her soul. She is completely absorbed in it, and so carried away by ecstasy, that she almost loses all consciousness, and forgets the cause which called her out—the Mass.

“Oh, Francesco! I would indeed bid you adieu, and most tenderly, but are you worthy of it?”

“If mortal be worthy of your love, I am, Amalia. No one can love you worthily, unless with a love boundless, supreme, eternal; and I do love you so, my beautiful one. You ask me, am I worthy of your love? It is too precious, it is true, that I should boast myself worthy of it.”

He had approached her, and gently led her aside, and she permitted him to do so unrebuked.

“If honour, esteem, and reputation will suffice,

I swear to you by the sentiment which blesses me with the purest felicity ; by my love for you, I am worthy of it. If you desire glory, renown, celebrity, I feel myself strong to win all, so that I be but inspired by your love—so that your love be my guerdon.”

“ Oh, are you worthy of it ?” repeated Amalia, with an accent of sad and affectionate reproach.

“ I !—No, I am not worthy of it ! No mortal is worthy to possess that precious boon. But impose any condition that man may fulfil, and I will fulfil it to become so.”

“ Be it so then. All I ask of you,” she said, tenderly, “ is to become a good Christian, and *then* I will be yours.”

“ Am I not a good Christian ?” exclaimed he, vehemently, a thought striking him suddenly as to what might have been insinuated to his discredit, and by whom. “ I believe in the Gospel bequeathed by the Divine Saviour to men for their light and salvation. I believe, and believing with humility of heart, I am a Christian.”

“ But you do not go to church. You are never seen at Mass. Oh, beatitudinous Virgin !

What will become of me? I ought to be at church. Mass has commenced. Don Giuseppe is performing it. Adieu! Let me go. Oh, heavens! I am lost!" And she endeavoured to release her hand.

"One word more, Amalia. I conjure you by the affection of our infancy, when we loved without fear or superstition!" And he continued, "I seek the truth. Wherever I find it, I accept it. I have not found the truth where you believe it to be."

"Ah, dear Francesco," she said, holding his arm tightly, with an almost convulsive grasp, "I beseech you, if not for yourself, for my sake, for my happiness; I entreat you, in order that I may love you without remorse, without experiencing terror and affright; so that I may love you with all the transport of the tenderest affection, and that my love may not be condemned as impious; I entreat you to believe as I believe. I love you,—I feel I must love you! My life is a burden to me without you. To love you is my existence, my being, my only consolation!"

"Oh, repeat, repeat those sweet words which irradiate my soul! Repeat, my only love, those

sweet sounds which go down into my heart and make it bound with unknown delight, which shed over it the most exquisite balm."

So saying, his face touched hers, their hair intertwined, their mingled breath was pure but troubled, and she murmured, with an expression of sad and beseeching supplication, "You will believe as I do, Francesco."

"Oh, Amalia! Amalia!" he exclaimed, "unless you overcome your prejudices and cease to listen weakly to the arguments of those by whom you are surrounded, of those who would blind and delude you, you cannot ever be mine; and I—if I lose you—I shall die. Life is only endeared to me by your love. Without that, it were a burden to be abhorred.—Well, I make an agreement with desolation; I embrace grief willingly; I will sit in the bitterness of death all the days of my life that may yet remain to me,—a bitterness of grief vast as the ocean, deep as an abyss:—in the renunciation of you, my beloved above every beloved, I make agreement with despair, and accept her as the constant companion of my miserable days: for I can never embrace that faith which I fully hold

to be superstitious, idolatrous, antisocial, adulterating the sacred writings."

Amalia uttered not a word of opposition ; in the fulness of her heart she wept bitterly, and she gazed and gazed upon her beloved, and drank from his eyes deep draughts of love. But what love !—the love of despair, which dried up her soul ; but still she experienced the tender passion, and scintillations of unbounded affection beamed from her tearful eyes ; with winning combination of smiles and tears, she gazed tenderly upon him, and returned the pressure of his hand. She had forgotten Mass in the excitement of love and grief.

"Holy Mother !" exclaimed she, abruptly, "what will become of me ? Mass is finished, the people are leaving church ! Gracious heaven ! What shall I do ? What must I say ?"

"Say that you saw me and spoke to me, and that I detained you. Say it frankly ; you have no need to be ashamed of my love."

"But we must part now, and perhaps for ever." These last words were broken with sobs.

"We must separate, dearest delight of my

soul," cried Francesco ; " but I here take solemn oath that, whatever my fate may be, whatever may be the obstacles that divide us, I will ever be true to you. No other love shall ever engross my heart. Your image shall ever occupy it, to the exclusion of all others. You I will ever love with unbounded tenderness, with the love of a devoted heart. I will ever live to you, for you ; and you, my beloved, will you ever love me ? "

" Ah, yes—ever ! ever ! " murmured she, in low tones, expressive of immeasurable affection. Their lips joined, and they sealed their vows of love. They separated, but their hearts were bound by an indissoluble tie. She retraced her steps homewards, he took the way towards the country, and disappeared among the trees.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ENTHUSIASTIC ASPIRATIONS OF A LOVING
HEART.

WITH slow step and in sweet and pensive meditations, Francesco returned towards the house. He scarcely knew whether the feeling of delight or sadness more prevailed, in thinking over this agitating meeting. On the one hand, the obstacles seemed to him almost insuperable. How could he hope to possess himself of a heart so devoted to blind superstitions, so influenced by bigots, and, worse than all, by those who assumed the pharisaical garb of holiness, in order to domineer over the female mind? But again he thought, "What is all this in the face of love?—Love will overcome her scruples. She loves me, and desires to be mine. I have found

the woman who was born for me, the companion intended for me by Providence,—my heart tells me so. I felt it when a child, and now I feel it as a man. Our souls were but now lost in each other, and kissed each other dearly; our hearts were mingled together, they beat together. I felt within me the beating of hers; even as she felt the beating of mine. A flood of unutterable sweetness overwhelmed me when I saw her,—she was equally enraptured. Our hearts spoke, they comprehended each other. We love, we have embraced with the gentle embrace of undying affection. She is mine, I am hers, for ever. No mortal power shall divide us; no wiles of man shall take her from me; no obstacles, however formidable, shall arrest me. I will brave and conquer all; she is the woman of my heart, she ought to be mine, and she shall be mine.”

Thus did Francesco commune with himself, his ardent fancies disposing his heart and mind to the noblest efforts.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MASS PROCEEDS.

A FEW moments before the occurrence of the scene we have described, Don Giuseppe was in the church celebrating Mass.

Kneeling, he made his preparation, which consisted in muttering certain appointed prayers ; and he made it in a careless and indifferent manner, whilst his thoughts were only directed towards an earthly object. Instead of offering homage to the Creator, he adored one of his creatures. He mechanically said the prayers preceding the celebration. Mechanically he made the reverence to the Crucifix of the sacristy, and dressed in the usual habiliments, mechanically, with the cup in his hand, he entered the church and approached the altar. He cast a

glance at the seat of the Fossombroni family. Nobody is there. "She will be here in a moment," he thought. At the *Dominus Vobiscum*, after the *Gloria*, the priest turns towards the people. He cast a glance again towards the seat,—still no one there. His look is that of a caged serpent, which would envenom by the glance of its eye, being prevented by its bars from stinging. His storm-troubled breast heaves, his head whirls. By a great effort he succeeds in composing himself, and continues the service, listening to the footsteps of every fresh arrival in hopes of distinguishing her; but her light step comes not, the air around him is not freshened by her presence. At the *Dominus Vobiscum*, after the *Credo*, the priest, according to usage, turns again. Again he can look, and casts a glance which seems to have the consuming power of lightning, which must have made the heart tremble of any one who had encountered it. No one. He could have roared, he could have howled, and the *Dominus Vobiscum* was recited with a growl of devouring and impotent rage, like that of a chained lion.

At the *Orate fratres*, the priest again turns

towards the congregation. He looks again. No one. Who can describe the intense wrath which fills his breast? Desolating hatred towards all mankind fills his mind. He repeats the service without knowing what he is saying. He reads the words his Missal offers to his eye, but his mind is far away from his Missal, far from the spot, far from the Mass.

A faintness seizes him, but he determinately resists it, and proceeds with the Mass. He comes to the consecration, and pronounces the solemn words. The people believe that the miracle of Transubstantiation has taken place. That man who, according to Romish credence, holds his God in his hand, nourishes in his heart one single thought, one single passion, one single desire—the thought of vengeance, the passion of jealousy and hate, the desire of blood. The heart of his rival—shall we venture to say it?—would at that moment have been a most acceptable morsel to his burning throat, could he have pressed it quivering, warm, and bleeding, between his teeth. He could no longer doubt. He felt quite convinced that whilst he was engaged in saying Mass,

Francesco and Amalia were together ; and he who would have bounded over a crater, who would have braved death at the mouth of a hundred cannon, who would have trodden over the corpse of his mother in his anxiety to prevent this meeting ;—he was tied to the altar, before a group of idiots, to play the farce of the Host, whilst they were luxuriating in the pleasure of meeting, of conversing,—perhaps, even, of embracing.


He continues Mass. Everything is perverted to his eye. The altar, the cross, the saints, the candles, all spin round and round, and seem transformed into a band of mocking, living beings. But the Mass must go on. He must make superhuman efforts, for he cannot quit the altar. To leave Christ ! abandon Him on the altar and retire !—impossible ! The Mass goes on, and must go on, and in the meantime he is enduring anguish the more terrific that he is compelled to conceal it. He pictures the happy lovers among the fields, and flowers, and meadows, blessed in each other's society. “ Oh, Death, where art thou ?—Come to my aid ! An age of felicity could not repay the agony of

the present moment : it is more than I can endure." All this while the Mass is proceeding. So great was the torment of his soul, that he felt he must die—but his desire of vengeance made him struggle to support life. He declared he would live to revenge himself. Vengeance, vengeance, was the cry of his heart, while the Mass was still proceeding.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE EARS HEAR NOT, BUT THE EYES SEE.

At length the Mass concluded. The celebrant priest retired with simulated composure to the sacristy ; but a slight unsteadiness was observable in his walk, though his confusion was not remarked. The furious tempest of his soul was pent up in his breast, his countenance was impassible ; but when he turned to the people, his livid hue and troubled eye manifested signs of inward agitation. But the signs were very slight ; the priest is accustomed to dissimulation ; he is accustomed to smile upon those he hates, to assume a gentle expression of countenance when his heart is filled with wrath, to utter winning and courteous words to those whom he would willingly crush to atoms.



Retired to the sacristy, he hastened to divest himself from his sacerdotal trappings. Released from the restraint of the altar, the frenzy which had possessed his mind passed away. At the altar he could not move, he could not think freely, he could not attempt to remedy the evil, and this restraint excited an internal agitation, which raised a complete delirium of rage, jealousy, and desperation.

Now that he found himself free to reflect calmly, he could begin to breathe again. "What a fool I am," he thought, "to anticipate evils which may never arrive. Perhaps the Marchioness required her services, and detained her; perhaps she was not dressed, and found herself too late. Many accidents may have happened, all more probable than her meeting with Fantoni." Reasoning thus, he tranquillized himself, and remained quiet for a time, more fully to compose his agitated spirits. With this view he went into a room apart from the sacristy, and closed the door, that his privacy might not be intruded upon. He walked up and down a short time to refresh himself, and distract his thoughts with the exercise. He approached a

window guarded by iron bars, to enjoy the air, and leaned against the bars, to look out upon the country. The morning air cooled his burning face, and quieted the violent throbbing of his temples, excited by the powerful concentration of his mind in one tremendous thought.

But the lull of the storm was quickly broken, and was succeeded by a still more furious tempest. He saw among the trees, at a considerable distance, two persons who evidently belonged to the respectable class—a man and woman. That they were young he was certain, from the bearing of both. Yes, they are young. He knows them, he knows them—they are Francesco and Amalia !

No pen can describe his rage at the sight. The priest suffers the most horrid imprecations to burst from his impure lips ; imprecations the more bitter, because he is compelled to utter them in suppressed tones. He clasped the iron bars with his hands, and shook them with his vigorous arm, until it seemed they must give way under his powerful grasp. His eyes flashed flames of rabid indignation and wrath.

He clenched his teeth, and ground them like a wild beast. He watches and sees—yes, he sees that kiss, that seal of pure affection with which they part.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ASSASSIN IN JUDGE'S GOWN.

UPON Don Giuseppe's return to the sacristy, the Sacristan was quite alarmed at the sudden change which had taken place in his appearance. He observed that his hand trembled as he put on his clerical hat to leave the church.

"Are you ill, sir?" said he.

"Yes, I am not very well," answered Don Giuseppe, with changed voice.

"Can I get you anything?"

"No, thank you, I am going home."

"Will you allow me to accompany you?"

"Oh, no—it is nothing. The air will revive me. Good morning;" and he set forth. He met a few poor labourers going to their work. They saluted him, but he did not return their

salutation, for he was too much engrossed with his own feelings to see them. He musters all his forces to recompose himself, but it will not do; his black eye is deep sunken; round about it is drawn a livid circle; his death-pale lips are contracted by intensest bitterness—it seems as if poison shoots from them: such is the potency of the working of the rage within, that it tosses and boils over, deforming and devastating in a moment the fairest and most agreeable countenance, suffusing it with the livid hue of decomposition. An hour before, he had appeared handsome and healthy, his look firm and sparkling with intelligence, his aspect serious and pleasing, and his smile noble and winning. But the man in that one half-hour's struggle with rage and impotent jealousy was completely transformed, and his appearance was horrible as that of a corpse. But he possessed a resolute disposition and powerful will, and his temper was unbending. He hid his rage in the depths of his heart, smoothed his brow, and relaxed his compressed lips. His eye resumed its brightness, and he did his utmost to regain his usual appearance, so that but slight traces remained

of his recent emotion. He exerted himself to enter the house with a serene countenance and composed demeanour. He succeeded in escaping observation. He took his coffee, and pretended to be gay and cheerful. He talked a great deal, but made no allusion to Amalia's absence from church. He retired to his apartment to collect his thoughts, and decide upon his future plan of operations.

After mature deliberation he determined upon a course of action which was somewhat imprudent, but which commended itself to him for its cruelty. He resolved to summon Amalia to his own rooms, where, without fear of interruption, he might torture her to his heart's content. He rang the bell, a servant appeared, and he sent a message to Lady Amalia, requesting her to have the goodness to come to his study. The request did not excite surprise, for she studied with him, and was in the habit of going there for her lessons or religious duties.

Just so does a rapacious kite or hawk hover in the air, wheeling round a dove-cote, where two faithful doves bear each other company. In what trepidation of affright are the innocent

little creatures? They shrink to the darkest corner, cling to each other, and press their wings flat to their sides, as if to make themselves smaller, and avoid the glance of their cruel enemy; they repress their gentle and soothing moan: but the winged tyrant sees them, grasps them in his claws, and bears them off to his solitary heights to consummate his cruelty. So with Amalia. Trepidation like to that of the dove seized her at the summons. She felt her spirit sink and her heart fail within her. She would willingly have shrunk into air, and rendered herself invisible. She would have passed through fire, rather than confront her tormentor. She felt herself guilty. She hesitated long upon the stairs, but feeling that she must submit, quite breathless at length she entered the room.

She tries to assume an appearance of security, but her face denotes her mental agitation, for she is not a Don Giuseppe.

"You were not at Mass," said he, harshly, and with a tone of decision, as if incited by love of right to examine the matter, "and why were you not?"

"Because—because—I could not. I rose—late," stammered she faintly.

"You rose late ! why, when I left, you were nearly ready, and I delayed Mass half-an-hour on your account."

"Yes—but—I had not finished dressing, and without being aware of it, the time slipped away—it passed so quickly."

"The time passed so quickly, Lady Amalia, because you were indulging in sin," answered he, not angrily, but solemnly, and his voice re-echoed terribly in her soul. "Do not dissimulate. The tempter took advantage of you, if he who appeared before you, in pleasing aspect, were not himself a demon."

"I—I—Signor—Signor—Don Giuseppe, I do not understand——"

"You will understand me, perhaps, when I tell you that I beheld you with my own eyes, when you thought yourself concealed—that I saw you when you so sinfully abandoned yourself to your tempter—to the man who wills your perdition." In such terms did he speak of this pure and innocent conference ! "With my own eyes I beheld the contamination of your lips, from

which you can never more obliterate the stain of sin." The poor girl involuntarily raised her hand to her lips, as if they had literally contracted the stain of which he spoke. "Miserable girl! you are already far advanced on the road to perdition. Woe unto you if God withdraws from you his protecting hand! You are doing your utmost to irritate Him, and He may at last abandon you to your sin. I speak to you plainly and decidedly, for my heart is grieved by your obstinacy."

She trembled like the leaves of a tree shaken by the morning breeze. She felt herself in an awful position, plunged into a deep pit, from which she could not extricate herself, and she was compelled to solicit the aid of that formidable man to liberate her, or she must perish.

"You are lost," exclaimed he. "You are a prey to the wiles of Satan." She was almost suffocated by her sobs. "It was Satan who placed in your path, at that unseasonable hour, that infidel—the instrument of your perdition—and put bewitchingly fatal words into his mouth. He purposely placed himself in your path at the very moment that you ought to have been at-

tending the holy Sacrifice. He it was who made you forget all, and abandon yourself to the arms of your seducer"—this expression addressed to an innocent girl was worthy of a Roman Catholic priest—"at the moment that God summoned you to his own service by my voice. This may have been the very last time that God would offer you the opportunity of repentance. He will now, in all probability, abandon you. I can read the secrets of your heart. God gives me penetration to do so. *His* image is impressed on your heart with the impress of fire," says the priest, with flashing eyes. "You love *him* still, and with the love of delirium, for you are still inspired by Satan, who thus plans your destruction, and will make you his prey. Go! go! yield yourself up to him."

"Oh, have mercy! have mercy!" exclaimed she, prostrating herself as before her judge. The cruel priest rose and locked the door, she clinging to his knees beseechingly. A glance of savage triumph overspread his face.

"Rise, unhappy girl," he exclaimed. "It is not I who can grant you pardon, it is God of whom you must ask it, and without loss of time,

for your moments may be counted, and this very instant you may die unrepentant."

Her agitation and affright knew no bounds. She rose and entreated of him to confess her immediately, but her strength failed her, and she fell fainting.

Pitying angels were surely guarding poor Amalia at that moment. The priest raised the unconscious girl from the floor, but, at the touch of his convulsed lips which he dared to press against hers, she started as if galvanized, and uttered a low moan, indicative of intense suffering. This natural repulsion recalled him to the awkwardness of his position, and he began to have recourse to the most available means for reviving her. He continued for some time to sprinkle her face with water, and bathe her forehead, making her breathe a restorative.

At length she sighed, and showed signs of returning animation. Her eye wandered wildly around for a moment, but she soon recalled the circumstances and the reality of her sufferings.

"Have courage, Amalia," said the hypocrite, tenderly. "God will pardon you, I hope, pro-

vided only you do your best to conquer your passion. See how merciful He is to you at this moment. He has taught you that life and death are in his Hand. Your fainting fit might have been the sleep from which man will awake only in the day when the angelic trumpet shall sound ; it might have been the sleep of death. But you have recovered, and you have time to repent, and you ought not to lose this time."

" Yes," she answered languidly, " I might have died. I do not wish to lose time. I wish to confess before I leave this—before I leave this room," said she, with a great effort, for she experienced an almost insurmountable repugnance to submitting to Don Giuseppe. She felt like the slave under his master's whip, and, like him, she was compelled to submit. Why fight against destiny ? The slave's lot is to submit, and she was the slave of Don Giuseppe. Did she rebel, he brandished the whip and scourge over her head to recall her to her duty.

When Amalia expressed her wish to confess immediately, Don Giuseppe's heart throbbed with joy. " She will confess to me—she is mine, I have the key of her thoughts, which I

can lock and unlock at pleasure. She will now be an easy conquest."

Did he reason thus on moral grounds, or on grounds more criminal? This we leave undecided ; perhaps he himself left the question unanswered.

Don Giuseppe had made gigantic strides in the path of evil. He was capable of every enormity. But his eye was not yet so boldly defiant, that he could help averting his gaze when he saw himself on the point of committing a crime. Yet a little longer, and he will look it in the face without the least feeling of horror, as the murderer sees his victim before him, and his eye quails not, nor does his pulse quicken, as he stabs him to the heart.

He feigns not to understand the desire she expresses. "Before you leave this room, you ought to expiate your crime, to ask for pardon with a contrite heart. I will pray with you."

"But I wish—I would—beg of you, for charity, to confess me. My confessor is in town, and I should have to wait a day or two for him. I beg of you, for pity's sake, to confess me."

"Well, my daughter, lift your thoughts to

God, and with a contrite heart ask pardon of Him for your offence ; and may He open the treasures of His mercy, that the sins of His rebellious daughter may be remitted. May He, by means of confession, wash all stain from your soul, and purify and cleanse you, that He may receive you again among his children."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MAN DARES TO PRONOUNCE IN THE NAME
OF GOD !

AMALIA knelt, and with fervency repeated the act of contrition. At that moment she forgot her Francesco and her love for him, wholly absorbed as she was by compunction, and the hope of pardon. The priest seated himself near her with solemn and commanding manner, and rigid and severe aspect. His voice was smooth and unctuous, and studiously modulated to excite reverential emotions. She is kneeling, he is seated and looking down upon her. In her kneeling position her form presents to his eye graces which would excite the rapturous enthusiasm of a painter, and which awaken the most powerful sensations of admiration in the

heart of the voluptuous. The minister of religion gazes and gazes on the pious, agitated, and trembling maiden, who, all unconscious, only sees herself kneeling at the feet of a man of God—a saint.

“My God, I repent with my whole heart of having offended Thee, not only for the Heaven I have forfeited, and the hell I have merited, &c.,” said she, in tones of deepest contrition. Don Giuseppe’s voice was so tremulous, that she believed him excited by the most holy emotions—but his emotions were far from holy!

“Behold me, Christ Jesus crucified,” he began, “as before Thy feet I lay aside all the pride of sin, and with humiliation of spirit and compunction of heart, bow before Thee to confess my faults. And Thou, oh Jesus, give me Thy grace, by Thine ineffable merits, and be for me the fountain of justification and pardon, that laying low at Thy feet all human affections, forgetting every earthly attachment, and sacrificing them all to Thee, whatever it may cost me, I may obtain pardon for my sin, and strength to persevere for the future. Amen.”

This brief meditation of the priest, delivered

in pitying and touching tones, penetrated her soul with hope and holy affection.

"Now, my daughter, confess your sins, not to man, but to God, represented by man, and if you repent, your sins shall be remitted."

"Father, it is a week since I have confessed. I have no sins to confess since then with regard to the common concerns of life, but I have committed other sins for which I was not prepared, for they were unknown to me before. I saw *him* for the first time at the Countess Belfiore's. I pretended not to recognize *him*, and he spoke to me."

"In what manner?" said the priest.

"In a noble and affectionate manner, and he immediately professed his love, and I accepted it, because it was not a love sprung up then, but had existed from our infancy; and he said that he would always love me, and I did not answer, but gave him to understand that I accepted his love and returned it, and he told me that he would see me again, and I returned home and thought, and thought about him without any compunctions of conscience, because it did not seem wrong to me; only I thought I ought not

to have encouraged him so quickly ; but the affection I felt was stronger than my prudence ; and I saw you directly after, and I would not tell you nor others anything. I do not know why, but I could not hide the truth from you, when you questioned me ; and then you painted him in such frightful colours, and I tried not to think any more about him ; but I had a temptation which I had not courage to tell you, Father."

"But you must tell me, or else your confession is a sacrilege."

"But this temptation relates to a person whom I ought to respect and honour. It relates to you, Father."

"What can this temptation have been ?" thought the Confessor, a vague hope, which he could hardly explain to himself, entering his mind.

"I had a temptation which occupied my mind, and which I tried in vain to overcome. A thought that I could not help would enter my head, a thought against you"—his heart beat—"and it was that you were not sincere, that you had rea-

sons of your own for speaking to the discredit of him."

A death-shudder passed over the priest.

"But that was a temptation I soon overcame, and I was ashamed that such a wicked idea should have entered my mind about you, who do so much for me and the good of my soul. You have occupied my mind in salutary exercises, and I was completely absorbed in the pious works enjoined by them, in prayer, in meditation, and in sacred reading, after your discourses and meditations; but I always had a thought in the midst of my most fervent devotions—a thought that I did not like to confess to myself—the thought of him; and when I prayed, I prayed for him and not for myself, and when I meditated on the truths of our holy religion—on the mysteries of the Passion—I wished to have *him* as the companion of my meditations."

A slightly mocking smile curled the lips of the Confessor.

"And I prayed to God to touch his heart, and I often indulged in the delightful thought that he might be converted and turned to the

right path ; and then I thought, Father, that I might love him, and love him dearly, without remorse. And I indulged in this idea a great deal ; and so, Father, that is the way I have passed these last ten days. And so I performed the spiritual exercises with this thought, which, against my will, always possessed me, and I desired to see him once more, but I did not hope it—indeed, I feared to see him ; and I intended, if I had the opportunity, to try to convert him, and love would have made me eloquent, and perhaps I should have been permitted to have more influence with him than a great and learned man would. And so these few days have passed, and this terrible day came at last, and I went out to hear you say Mass, and I met him, and he spoke to me so warmly, that I could not resist, and I stopped, and his words were so sweet that I forgot the Mass ; and he said such touching things that I was almost out of my mind ; and he spoke to me so of his love, that I was quite overcome with tenderness. And then I told him of the reports about his being an irreligious man, and he said things to me about his being as religious as we are,

and he said he believed and was a good Christian, but that he did not believe as we do ; that he did not believe in our superstitions, as he considered them, but in the Bible ; and he told me that he would choose rather to lose me than to subscribe to any other doctrine, because he would not do anything against his conscience. And when I took leave of him, I returned his kiss with a prolonged and ardent one, because I felt here at my heart such a rush of affection, that I could not withdraw my lips from his ; but when I kissed him, I entreated him to believe as I do, and he spoke to me tenderly, but refused to do so, because his conscience would not let him. That is all, Father. That is my sin, and I am frightened, because I cannot erase his image from my heart with all my efforts. I can weep over my crime. I can expiate it and renounce it for ever, but I can never forget him. I accuse myself so, Father, for my obstinacy in continuing to love him notwithstanding so many reasons to the contrary."

"Have you anything more to confess?"

"No, Father, all is concentrated in this love, all my sin consists in that."

From Amalia's confession Don Giuseppe could but too well see that her love for Francesco was inextinguishable, and that he himself was the object of her dislike—love and dislike which excited fresh fury in his breast, though, for the present, he dissembled his rage.

“You see, my daughter,” he said with refined hypocrisy, “that your unfortunate aberration has attained its present height in consequence of your not having governed your own inclinations in the first instance. You went on from error to error, from one sin to another. You remembered the young man, and you listened to his avowal of love. This affection you encouraged madly until it outgrew your love for the holy principles of religion.” The poor girl believed herself really steeped in sin. Such is the consequence of priestly and Jesuitical teaching. “Are you disposed to make every effort to dislodge from your breast this ill-starred love?”

“Yes, Father.”

“And you declare it before God; here, at the tribunal of Penitence, at my hands, invested as I am by God with the authority of a judge?”

"Yes, Father."

"And you will look upon your love as offensive to God, and will fly from it as from a horrible temptation?"

"Yes, Father."

"And you promise, by whatever means, or on whatever occasion you may chance to see him, you will escape from him as from a venomous reptile, and that you will avoid everything that may remind you of him?"

"Yes, Father, I promise—I promise sincerely." She experienced a sensation as of mortal agony at her heart. "I promise all; but you will give me Absolution?"

"Raise your thoughts, then, to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ; he who suffered so much for us, and for whom we ought to be willing to sacrifice our earthly lusts, or else by our sins we crucify him afresh continually. Yes, we by our sins are his crucifiers, and are accountable for his sufferings and Passion." Amalia compared to the Jews because of her chaste love! "We ought, from love to him, to pluck from our heart every earthly affection. Yes,—oh, my

crucified Jesus ! I here renounce at thy feet every seduction of Satan, and promise to break the chains of sin, and live and die only for thee. And I promise to flee every temptation of renewing my offences against thee. Oh, grant me, by the merits of thy passion and death, grace that I may walk in the path of uprightness, and that my repentance may be sincere and permanent. Amen. Now, my daughter, you will recite as a salutary penitence for a week, the seven Penitential Psalms which record the sin and the repentance of David, with three *Salve Regine*, in honour of the Virgin, and five *Pater, Ave* and *Gloria*, in commemoration of the five wounds of Jesus ; and say for a month every morning, noon, and evening, ‘ Jesus, Joseph, Mary, I give you my heart and soul.’ Now, my daughter, make an act of contrition, and receive holy absolution.”

“ My God, I repent,” &c., said she, pronouncing the words slowly and devoutly, as if they really proceeded from her heart, and she said the Act of Contrition [“ *Misereatur tui*,” &c.]

“May God bless you, my daughter, and grant you pardon.”

The wicked priest rose from his seat in triumph, and cast a glance of Satanic delight upon his victim. She rose too, feeling her mind greatly relieved.

So ended the confession, which is a faithful sample of the confession in the Romish church.

Poor Amalia ! thou wert born to be happy, and confer happiness upon others ; but thou art unhappy, and renderest others unhappy, not from any fault of thine, but by the fault of cruel Levites ! Thy pure heart, moved by affectionate emotions, would have pulsed tranquilly under the influence of true Christian piety and the pure light of the gospel, and purified and sanctified, it might have shone a jewel in the church of Christ. But now it grovels, melancholy and desolate, enveloped in the superstitions of false piety which invest thy spirit with terrors, excited to serve the dark machinations of a scheming priest. An innocent love, impressed upon thy heart by the hand of God, and designed by Providence to effect

thy felicity and that of another who is worthy of thee, under the ferocious inspirations of hypocrisy and priestly cunning, exerted for the vilest and basest purposes, is wrested into an obscene and impious passion. Thy love, so pure and holy, is represented to thee as the horrible inspiration of demons, and thy gentlest sentiments, under this fatal influence, are irritated and perverted, and their intended effects frustrated.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHICH BEARS NO TITLE.

THE fortnight had passed, and the Priest of Rivalta had returned to his duties, but his principles remained the same. Don Giuseppe was again completely domesticated with the family, and had once more leisure to torment his victim. Lady Amalia led a sad and desolate life, but was in appearance tranquil and resigned. Her heart was bleeding, but she uttered not a complaint, and scarcely confessed to herself how much she suffered. She found some comfort in prayer, the only resource of the suffering soul bowed down with heaviness. She had no human friend to whom to confide the anguish of her soul, and she poured her complaints into the ear of her heavenly Father. God is the

only fountain of consolation to the soul debarred of earthly comfort ; she looked to Him, and found some solace for her grief. Her appearance sufficiently indicated the fierce and continued struggle of her soul. But the pallor of her cheek only served to add a new charm to her countenance. Beauty is incalculably enhanced when suffused with sadness.

With desiring eye and envious heart Don Giuseppe contemplated the exquisite beauty of that saddened face, and passionate anger filled his breast as he reflected on its cause. He never now introduced the subject of her unfortunate passion, but he exerted himself to distract her from the settled sorrow that filled her mind. He treated her now with the utmost gentleness. For her he softened the tones of his voice, and overwhelmed her with the most delicate attentions.


Now that the health of the Marchioness was declining from day to day, her mind partook of the weakness of her physical frame, and her mental powers seemed pitiably deficient. Amalia continued to devote herself to her with the same patient and sedulous attention, passing

er time in her room. She would
d to make a confidant of her
she have inspired her with
al energy; but she saw that
g fast, and felt that she was,
at age, incapable of reciprocating
confidence of a gentle heart, so that
stricted her griefs to the solitude of her
wn soul. The Marchioness frequently re-
garded her with tenderness, but it was rather
the tenderness of habit and fixed sentiment than
a conscious and reasoning attachment.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SPIRIT OF EVIL SLUMBERS NOT.

DON GIUSEPPE, in the visible decline of the Marchioness, saw that each day's delay might be the fatal one that would separate him for ever from Amalia; he determined, therefore, to find an expedient to avert the peril. On the death of her grandmother, Amalia would be free; and he foresaw that the superstitious reverence which now caused her to submit to the domination he exercised over her spirit might cease. As her reason matured, she might become disgusted with the forms and restraints to which she now submitted; or, by contact with the world, might be induced to slight them; or she might even be brought to view religion in a juster light, guided by the counsels of some



good and sincere priest—for such there are among the clergy of Rome—and then what would be his prospects?—To be banished for ever from her presence, chased from her sight, and abhorred! Francesco would triumph before his eyes, rescue the poor dove from the toils of her ensnarer, and devote himself to her for ever. Even should matters not attain this point, he could not, as a matter of course, continue to reside in the same house with her. She must, of necessity, place herself under the protection of some family; indeed, by the laws of the government, she would be placed with her nearest relations. Her friends were by no means bigotted. Were Amalia, then, under their protection, he could no longer see her to converse with her and control her conduct. She would contract, no doubt, the social habits of the gay world. With her cheerful disposition and superior intelligence, she would soon cease to be the devout fanatic, and, as a consequence of her mental freedom, her thoughts would again turn towards Francesco, and she would undoubtedly eventually marry him.

Now the only alternative seemed to be that of

contriving her marriage with some weak man devoted to religion and church, and a friend to the priesthood. Don Giuseppe was already acquainted with such a character ; and if she married him, to his house he might hope to gain access, and be a frequent guest. Thus he would preserve the opportunity of seeing her, and of continuing to be her spiritual director and counsellor without opposition or suspicion. He might even obtain authority in the family, and eventually become domestic priest. Thus he would be spared the mortification of seeing her the bride of him who was the object of his jealous rage, and would be revenged upon his enemy. Perhaps in time she might be brought to love him, or, at least, to look upon him with complacency, as the wife of an imbecile bigot—for such men are little calculated to captivate a woman's heart. Who could tell what might happen in time ?

CHAPTER XXXIX.

INTRODUCTION OF A NEW PERSONAGE WHO IS
NOT A HERO.

COUNT ALFREDINI was the only survivor of a noble and ancient family. He had inherited the whole of the ample wealth of his ancestors. His country mansion was about a mile distant from the residence of the Marchioness. Don Giuseppe had become acquainted with the Count at the seminary. They were about the same age, but in disposition, talents, and mental qualifications, were singularly diverse ;—the one of robust intellect and powerful will, inspired with lofty thoughts and perseverance in bringing them to maturity ; the other of weak understanding and vacillating will, incapable of conceiving or

executing a lofty purpose. Nor were their physical attributes less dissimilar;—the one of noble bearing and vigorous frame, and countenance expressive of vivacity; the other of timid and reserved deportment, his person inclining to stoutness, and his dull eyes manifesting not one spark of intelligence. Still the manners of the Count were gentle and winning. That amiability of deportment which is so often hereditary in the aristocracy, but which is sometimes only the veil to hide a proud and overbearing disposition that looks upon all beneath its own sphere as vile and of no account, was in him not assumed, but real. He was delighted when he could render himself agreeable to his friends, and was always ready to do them a service, scattering benefits around him with liberal hand.

His nature was most unimpassioned. Strong passions agitate those who are endowed with a strong mind and powerful constitution, and a superabundance of vital force. His affections were gentle and unruffled. His heart was disposed to benevolence, but rather of the passive than the active kind. Impulsive emotion was

altogether foreign to that weak mind and understanding.

As is generally the case with weak minds, he had a decided tendency to superstition. That which in woman is vivid impression and ardent fancy, is in man weakness only. Superstition in woman arises from her impassioned nature ; in man from coldness of temperament and poverty of intellect. Superstition differs from fanaticism in that the latter may have place in the strongest mind. Under the influence of principle, the most determined characters are excited to commit deeds of the most excessive fanaticism. Superstition and fanaticism are to each other what idiotcy is to insanity. Idiotcy is tranquil, innocuous, placid, and unmoved. Its state is the quietude of moral and physical inertia. Madness, on the contrary, manifests itself in acts of fury and blind explosions of rage. The hands are ready for blood, the spirit burns with the thirst of destruction. Superstition calls upon its votaries to hear masses upon masses, to hang votive offerings on the altar, to wear scapules and relics and amulets upon their breasts ; to run from church to church ; to multiply

devotions, pardons, rosaries, novenas, chaplets, crowns, and coronets ; and to attend to a host of futile and absurd practices, the folly and silliness of which insult the majesty of God.

When women give themselves up to these practices, their own natural susceptibility and excitable imagination ennoble and exalt them in no slight degree. But man, born to sterner duties and stronger work, cannot stoop to these trivialities without suffering complete mental enthrallment and imbecility. Fanaticism confounds holy zeal with intolerance. Intolerance is a deadly weapon in the hand of a furious man. It wounds, mutilates, and consumes the miserable bodies of its victims, while the fanatic declares and believes, in his senseless zeal, that he is performing works of righteousness, innocence, and charity, which cannot fail of pleasing God. According to the fanatic, he is employed in executing the most exemplary deeds of piety and gentleness ; and the groans of martyrs, suffering the tortures of the cord, boiling water and oil, or fire, and the sighs and cries of the dying, ascend with grateful odour to the Lord, and are to Him an acceptable sacrifice.

But Count Alfredini was superstitious only. Weak of mind and intellect, he had passed his time in the continual performance of frivolous ceremonies since he left the seminary, where he made little or no proficiency.

Between Don Giuseppe and the Count a familiar intercourse sprang up in the seminary, and ripened into a species of friendship, though a friendship of the kind which must necessarily exist between two young men so opposite. There Don Giuseppe exercised complete control over the mind of his friend; led him at his own pleasure; counselled him, and made him subserve his own purposes. The Count was well content, in his simplicity, to be thus directed, and Don Giuseppe carefully cultivated his friend's tendency to superstitious devotion.

After quitting the seminary, they maintained their friendly relationship. Don Giuseppe very often visited the Count, and directed him in his minute and incessant religious observances. Instead of endeavouring to enlighten him with serious and practical teaching, he continually strove still further to blind his judgment, and even to strengthen him in his superstitions.

Nor did he adopt this system thoughtlessly. A clever priest will ever be ready to take advantage of those weak minds which allow themselves to be deceived and guided by a false religion—the religion of gold.

CHAPTER XL.

A PRIEST INDUCTS A BIGOT INTO THE SCHOOL
OF LOVE.

DON GIUSEPPE's mind now turned towards the Count for the furtherance of his wicked schemes. "He is just the man I want," thought he; "he is stupidity incarnate. If I can only succeed in my project, I shall indeed have cause to exult, or my vengeance will be amply satisfied."

With these thoughts in his mind he went to call upon the Count. Upon arriving, he was received with every mark of respect. He entered the apartment of the Count, which bore manifest signs of the devotional tendency of the master of the house. A perfect want of harmony and taste characterized the arrangement

of the objects in the room, and manifested the limited capacity of the owner.

In the room was a Crucifix fitted into a devotional 'stool; books of devotion, offices and lives of saints, lay scattered upon the tables. Not a single profane book was to be seen, nor had the Bible place among those holy productions. To possess a Bible would have been a sin serious enough to peril his salvation, and the Count would, of course, throw a hundred Bibles into the fire, sooner than risk his future happiness.

This room was the Count's private apartment, into which none but his most intimate friends were admitted. Perhaps the signs of his bigotry were more strongly marked in the choice of his pictures, than in anything else; and their arrangement was, it must be confessed, any thing but artistic. Saints of every size, in prints, paintings, and drawings, were distributed around in profusion, and the walls were completely covered with them. Here Saint Jerome with an enormous stone is striking his breast. A picture of St. Joseph represents him as an old man, with a bewildered expression of countenance. The meek Virgin is sweetly looking on her babe

whom she holds naked in her arms, and whose little hand is caressing her face. For the picture of Saint Filomena he had paid almost fabulous sums to a renowned artist, who laughingly blessed the good sense of the simple Count. Though some of the pictures were of but little value, many were really precious. For the inferior, however, he had paid the price usually given for the most valuable, though he had not bought the precious at the price of the inferior. It is easy enough to meet with the person who is so ignorant as to sell the *mediocre* as valuable, though far from easy to find the man who sells the good as *mediocre*. The Count was just the buyer to pay for the inferior as good, though not to secure the good for the price of the inferior.

This choice room contained, besides the pictures, many objects perfectly childish—indeed, the poor man was nothing more than a child with a beard on his chin, and twenty-eight years on his head. He had caused the sad history of our first parents to be executed to his own order, and under his own superintendence. Adam and Eve were represented sporting in the garden in

their primitive innocence. Again, they were represented in the act of being chased from the garden, and weeping at their fall. And again they were represented shedding tears when they learned the horrible deed of their fratricide son. This melancholy history, describing this accumulation of woe, was represented with the most puerile art. The garden was formed of moss. The lions, bears, wolves, and all the other animals ranging the garden so peacefully were of painted pasteboard, and altogether the representation was one of the most tasteless and absurd that can be imagined. Various little glass cases lay about, containing wax images of the holy child bedecked with common artificial flowers and paper grass; the head adorned with a "glory" of brass wire. Thus did his private cabinet bear witness to the bad taste of the man, and to the puerility and contractedness of his mind.

When Don Giuseppe entered, the Count was engaged in saying the office of the Madonna. He made a sign to him to wait a few moments; and the priest regarding him with an air of compassion, said to himself, "This is the man for

me. I can do what I like with him. He will be a passive instrument in my hands. He is harmless in himself, but I can render him hurtful. He is an inoffensive wooden sword, which I will endow with a sharp and venomous edge to draw blood with merely just grazing the skin. One infected drop will be fatal to the whole system, and suffice to cause death." Such cruel thoughts passed through his mind, as the Count recited the office. At last he concluded by crossing himself twice. With an air of courtesy and deference, but still with the familiarity which school companions in Italy generally maintain in after-life, he said,

"Excuse me, Don Giuseppe, I am at your service now."

"I have come at last to see you, Count, for it is an age since we met."

"It is indeed! So long a time has never elapsed before, and I hope never will again."

"I have been very much occupied lately. For a fortnight I have had to attend, as you know, to the Parish of Rivalta, the priest being sent to the convent to perform the exercises. But how are you getting on? what are you

occupying yourself about?" said Don Giuseppe, impatient to introduce the subject he had in view.

"I am reading the legends of the saints. It is a long time since I have read them. Oh, how I enjoy this holy reading. It is truly wonderful to read the actions of the great saints and their miracles. They are so important, it is most edifying to read them."

"Indeed it is a salutary exercise. I very often get Lady Amalia to read the lives of the saints. What an excellent young person she is! so devout and innocent! She is as affectionate as a dove, and has not a spark of malice in her heart. Her greatest pleasure is to pray, to read devotional books, and to occupy herself in works of piety."

"Indeed!" answered the simple man, showing great interest.

"She is quite different from the generality of young ladies. They think of nothing but dress and pleasure, and theatres and pastimes and beaux. They go to Mass just once in a way on festival days, and then they choose the priest who will perform it the most quickly and negli-

What satisfies their conscience. But she is willing to hear Mass every day, never tired. She cares nothing about amusements. All her pleasure consists in praying. She has a perfect horror of theatres, and as for going to a ball, she would sooner climb to the top of a mountain with a hundred-pound weight on her back!"

"Dear girl! I am really interested in her," said the Count, with a cold and unimpassioned tone. "I have never seen her since she came home from the convent."

"Oh, it is a difficult matter to meet with her. You go out so little, because you are so much occupied with your soul's concerns; and she is like you. You should come and pay us a visit, then you would see her. She is such a beautiful girl!"

"I should like to see her. I will certainly come and call upon you; indeed I ought to pay my respects to the Marchioness. How is the old lady?"

"Very poorly. In the last fortnight she has aged twelve months. If this change continues, she cannot last long, poor thing! But she is

prepared for death, and awaits her change without fear. The only thing she desires is to see her granddaughter settled before her death. But it is no easy matter to find any one suitable. Numbers of young men of respectable family would be delighted to win her; but with these wild young fellows it would be impossible for her, so good and religious as she is, to live. The young men of the present day have no fear of God. And that is why I esteem you so highly, my dear Count, because you always took care to avoid their evil example."

"Ah, indeed, their pleasures would afford me no pleasure. I find my enjoyments in my own room in serving God as far as I can."

"Oh, there are very few like you. How happy Lady Amalia would be to have a husband of your sort. How enviable would be such a couple! It would indeed be a union blessed of God, because contracted in his fear and for his glory."

"Ah, I am not worthy of your praise, I am but a sinner like the rest," said he, with the pretended humility which is transmitted by the priests to their bigoted and sanctimonious de-

votes. A novel idea, however, at that moment crossed the Count's brain. He asked himself, "Where would be the harm, if I were to marry so holy a woman?" At the same instant Don Giuseppe abruptly exclaimed,

"I know a man who would just suit her. They are made the one for the other."

"And who is he?" asked the Count, with an air of assumed indifference.

"You know him very well, Count; better than I do myself."

"I cannot think who," said he with a meaningful tone and smile. How well that knowing smile became that silly face! "I have no friends certainly to suit her. All my friends are priests, elderly men and devotees, or religious old ladies; and neither priests, nor elderly men, nor old ladies would suit her;" and he laughed aloud in approbation of his jest, which he thought stupendously clever.

His hilarity, however, was little to the taste of Don Giuseppe. The expression that a priest would not suit her, touched a fibre in his heart, that responded with a dolorous sound, and he smiled a forced smile. But the good Count

did not, of course, perceive the impression it produced upon his friend, who continued,

“ Well, it is the most intimate friend you have. Think now! It is the same as yourself.”

“ I have only one self;” and he laughed again, for he had no audience to whom he could intimate, *plaudite vulgus*, and he was astonished at his own monstrous overflow of wit. Don Giuseppe thinking it time to break the ice, said,

“ You are the person yourself.”

“ I? Is it possible? I am not suitable for her! I know very well I am not handsome, and have none of the worldly spirit of the young men who run away with young girls’ hearts.”

“ But that has nothing to do with it, my dear Count. You wrong Lady Amalia. Do not you recollect what we have just been saying, that the dressed-up young fops of the present day are not to her taste; they are all vain, and thoughtless of Religion. She must have a young man who leads a quiet life, who cares not for bustle, and company, and amusements, and

merry-makings, and, above all, who is religious, and will be a companion to her in her prayers."

"Oh, as to that, I should keep her company very willingly; indeed it would be a great pleasure to me to have a companion in my devotions."

While thus expressing himself, he felt an unwonted satisfaction pervade his heart in thinking how much more fervently and *willingly* he should pray in the company of a beautiful wife. This thought, sooth to say, was not altogether ascetic, but he did not the less represent it to himself as devout; and he continued,

"But I should not know how to make love. I never tried, and no one has ever told me how. I should not know how to go courting. Will you tell me what I must do, Don Giuseppe?"

"Oh, fie! do you suppose a priest can tell you."

"I do not know. Priests know every thing, and I suppose that among the rest."

"Oh! you dear Count! Sit down by the young lady and say sweet things to her."

"Oh! oh! oh! Sweet things! I do not know how to say sweet things. I do not believe

I could think of one, although I am not deficient in spirit generally." The vanity of the man! but we must pity him, he was about to enter the lists as an *innamorato*!

"My dear friend," interrupted Don Giuseppe, quite tired of absurdities uttered with so much pretension, "indeed this is not an opportunity to be neglected. You are the last of your family, and if you die single, with you an illustrious line will become extinct. It is your duty to keep up the family name. Thank God for giving you the present opportunity of casting your eyes upon a woman after your own heart. The alliance is one worthy of both families. Hers is rich and noble, so is yours. Providence never united a more suitable couple. There never were two persons in the world so well matched as you."

"Well, I am anxious it should be a bargain for I think she would suit me." (A bargain! what profanity!) "You, like the good friend you are and always have been, will do what you can for me, will you not? You will dispose Lady Amalia in my favour, and speak to the

Marchioness, and you will do your best to arrange all."

"You are decided then?"

"Quite! I am quite ready," said he with a slight degree of petulance, his fancy having become somewhat excited. "The thing is now to decide the Marchioness and Lady Amalia."

"Leave it to me. I take all upon myself, and you shall see that I will succeed. To-morrow morning you will call upon the ladies, but make your visit short."

"Yes, I will come, but you will be there, will you not?"

"Certainly."

Don Giuseppe recommended him to make the visit short, in furtherance of his plans. The amiable and aristocratic manners of the Count were calculated to impress strangers favourably, and induce them to value him above his real worth; while, in the course of a prolonged conversation, he was in danger of betraying his want of judgment, and his ignorance. Lady Amalia being possessed of good sense, sentiment, warmth of temperament, and a noble mind, would be liable to feel contempt and aversion for him; and

should she unfortunately imbibe such prejudices, it might be impossible for him to effect the marriage.

Having thus arranged matters, Don Giuseppe took leave of his friend, whom he left in a reverie, indulging in bright golden dreams. Returning homewards, he congratulated himself upon the happy result of his expedition, and felt certain as to the ultimate success of his undertaking. His scheme was indeed an abominable one, and all the more so, because appearing simple and natural to the uninitiated eye, it was, in reality, a plan of the most intense atrocity.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MACHINE, IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY,
WEAVES A WONDROUS WEB.

DON GIUSEPPE, feeling satisfied with the impression made upon the mind of the Count, next turned his attention to the ladies. Here great caution was requisite, for, although the connexion at first sight seemed suitable, yet it was an obstacle of no slight importance that the health of the Count was delicate, and that he was looked upon generally as but half-witted. These were potent reasons for refusing him, and Amalia would, of course, willingly avail herself of them to escape marrying him. The ladies and Don Giuseppe were seated at table when the latter commenced his diplomatic operations.

"I have been," said he, "to call upon a gentleman who was a companion of mine in the Seminary, and with whom I have been friendly ever since."

"Who is that?" asked Amalia, less from curiosity than civility.

"Count Alfredini."

"Is he in the country?"

"Yes; he has been here three days."

"I have not seen him for a long time," said the Marchioness, who could still comprehend the simple and ordinary matters of life, although her mind had become incapable of grasping anything complicated or unusual.

"He requested me to present his compliments to the ladies, and say, that he will do himself the pleasure of calling soon."

"I shall be happy to see him," said the elder lady; "he is an excellent young man, though he has not much sense."

"Your Ladyship wrongs him," said the priest; "you pay him less respect than he merits. He is certainly not a man of talent, nor has he the life and vivacity of modern young men, but he has good sense and piety. If his

conversation is not brilliant, it is amiable and pleasing."

"I have never seen him since I went to the convent," said Amalia, with some degree of indifference, but still with an expression of graceful deference, for she was interested in every one whose religious sentiments were in accordance with her own; and she had felt still deeper interest in such, since she had so ardently desired that Francesco should share her views of religion. "I remember very well how good he was," she continued; "I could not help liking him. He used to make me presents. He gave me beautiful saints and books of devotion, and would explain them to me with such patience and interest. I have always retained a most pleasing recollection of him."

"He is just the same now that he was then," returned the priest. "He is not ashamed, like the generality of young men, of being religious, but glories in it. It has a most salutary influence when the rich set an edifying example to the poor. He is very much beloved and respected for his liberality and kindness. He is one of the best benefactors of the church. When-

ever extra funds are required, for any object connected with religious worship, he is the first to assist with liberal hand, and set a good example to others. Though he is not held in high estimation, he is worthy of it. He is, I repeat, both sensible and amiable ; and the only reason for which he is held in light esteem, is one for which he ought to be the more honoured and appreciated—he is most devoutly pious. On this account, bad people, of whom the world is so full, condemn, as foolish, the man who is really and profoundly religious ; but neither your Ladyship, nor I, can despise the Count on this ground. Indeed, we ought to esteem him the more highly, seeing he braves the contempt of men who have no fear of God before their eyes, and despises the evil tongues of his detractors in the world, who only praise the thoughtless and irreligious,” and here he accented his words very significantly. “ He goes on his way secure and strong in the purity of his life, and in this respect he certainly manifests true courage, and manliness of character.”

The Marchioness, who was unable to follow his reasoning, which he uttered rapidly, ex-

claimed, "He is an excellent young man ! an excellent young man !"

But Amalia felt sympathy for him, though a sympathy purely spiritual, and quite different from that which already filled her heart towards another.

"He will render that woman extremely happy," continued Don Giuseppe, "who may join her lot to his, provided that she is not a woman of the world, but pious and religious. They will be of one accord, and will be helpers of each other in good works. Conjugal life is blessed indeed," and he gave to the tones of his voice a gentle and touching accent—"Conjugal life is blessed indeed when mutual companionship exists between the pair ; when they are united less for any other selfish consideration, than to serve God and to promote the spiritual advantage of their neighbours. That is the true design of matrimony. Our Lord Jesus Christ certainly did not raise it to the dignity of a Sacrament in order that marriage should be the accompaniment of a profane life and worldly habits. Husband and wife ought to cooperate in the sanctification of each other's souls, and be mutual

comforters, counsellors, and helpers to this holy end, which is never attained, except by the true Christian."

Amalia listened attentively, not because she felt interested in the Count, but because she applied the priest's observations to her own unfortunate love.

"It could not have been," said she to herself, with conscientious self-upbraiding, "a marriage pleasing in the sight of God, and would never have been blessed of Him;" and she felt still more confirmed in the impossibility of attaining to felicity by a marriage which, on the part of the bridegroom, would not be contracted in the fear of God. The consideration to which Don Giuseppe led her so artfully, respecting her unfortunate attachment, reconciled her still more to the idea, however painful and terrible it might be, of the necessity of giving up Francesco, unless God, by a miracle of grace, should touch his heart and call him to repentance.

In reasoning with Amalia, the priest cleverly acquitted the Count of the charge of silliness, which he justly merited. From his representations, she believed him to be sincere, and true-

hearted, with the loyalty of a man of honour, not with the simplicity of a boy. The latter attribute can never advance a man in the opinion of a woman, however bigoted she may be. Women like to recognise in man manly and vigorous sentiments.

Don Giuseppe felt satisfied that he had succeeded in producing impressions upon her mind favourable to his views, and began to see the future alliance of the families as a very possible event.

CHAPTER XLII.

HOW LOVE QUICKENS THE INTELLECT !

TWO days had elapsed since the colloquy between Don Giuseppe and the ladies respecting the Count. He thought it better not to renew the subject before the Count's visit, lest he might awaken suspicions. On the second day the Count called. His ardour was truly astonishing ; he was quite impatient to see Amalia, and to take measures, if she pleased him, to make a conquest of her without delay. After all, he was of the same flesh and blood as the rest of the sons of Adam, though the quality might be a little inferior. A cold temperament, delicate health, a mind lacking not only imagination but even perception, little tended to the development of the ardent passions. Of love and hate in their in-

tensity, therefore, he was incapable, but to the more gentle weaknesses of the sons of Adam his feeble nature inclined. One of these was vanity. The idea of marrying Amalia having once gained access to his mind, and having once set himself about the accomplishment of his object, he believed himself quite secure of gaining the heart of the beautiful girl. He could not believe himself so little captivating as to be incapable of producing an impression upon a woman's heart. Nor could he believe himself of a capacity so weak—and where is the man who does believe it?—as not to be appreciated for his judgment, and command attention for his conversational powers. Nor was he wrong; for, judged by his own standard, he was inferior to none. Nor were others to be blamed for esteeming him lightly, if the qualities with which his self-love invested him were invisible to them. It is the happiness of simpletons to be self-satisfied, whatever may be the opinion of the world.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Count should present himself at the house of the Marchioness with bold ideas of a splendid conquest,

and that he should entertain little doubt of success. His pretensions, moreover, were not ill-founded,—irrespectively of his personal merit,—for he had riches and rank, and these are instruments which can remove all inequalities. He might with reason then rest secure, his only mistake being as to the grounds of his success. He believed them subjective, when they were in reality purely objective. But he troubled not himself with logical distinctions, and knew little or nothing of philosophy and metaphysics.

Amalia and the Marchioness were seated ; the former working at an embroidery for the railing of an altar ; the latter abstractedly turning over the leaves of a book of devotion. Don Giuseppe was saying his office and glancing continually at Amalia, especially at the *Gloria* of the psalms. In reality, he paid no attention to the pursuit in which he pretended to be engrossed.

It is a daily duty of the priest to say the office, and a weary task it is to keep turning over the leaves of the breviary mechanically. On one page is an antiphony, on another a verse ; here a psalm, there a lesson ; here a prayer and

elsewhere a response, with the thousand requisite alterations, additions, or omissions to make the office applicable to one saint instead of another. The office is a torture for the poor priests. It is one of the most superstitious exercises, but being a daily obligation, it necessarily becomes in time a matter of course, like the most common actions of life. Don Giuseppe would gladly have excused himself from performing this duty, had not every priest been necessitated to go through it, and he feared discovery, if he failed in the performance of it. The office exercises a continual control over the conduct and piety of a priest. Every one can see whether he says it daily, and whether he says it devoutly. Every one can guess in what esteem the priest holds the office, and if he neglects it, it is inferred that he esteems it slightly, and he runs the risk of finding himself reported and ruined. Besides, the office may be said in company. One priest challenges another, "Shall we say the office?" and it is considered equally uncourteous and undevotional to refuse. In this way all inaccuracies are discovered in the thousand and one trivial practices of crossings, signings,

genueflections, inclinations of the head, besides all the other particulars before referred to with regard to verbal prayers.

“Count Alfredini,” announced a servant, throwing open the door, and ushering him into the apartment. The Marchioness made an effort to rise, not so much from compliment to him, as from the desire that infirm persons frequently manifest of being thought still vigorous, even when they are almost incapable of rising from their seats unassisted. This seems to be a struggle with death to dispute his omnipotence. But it is a vain contest—nature must yield. Death delays not one moment; his time is foretold.

The Count, with an air of gallantry, advanced at once to the Marchioness, and kissed her hand respectfully. She was still reclining in her easy chair, her efforts to rise having been vain.

“I hope that your Ladyship will permit me to offer you my compliments, since I have not had the honour of seeing you for so long a time.”

The complimentary phrase was anything but cavalier-like from an old acquaintance to an

have served very well for a
"It was expressed very

are to see you, my dear
Marchioness, courteously.

ned to Lady Amalia and for a
at her with a vacant stare, appa-
ck with her beauty. He soon, how-
covered himself, and with something of
gracefulness of aristocratic ease, though not
without embarrassment, he addressed her,

"I hope Lady Amalia retains a pleasing re-
collection of an old friend, who was deeply in-
terested in the graceful sports of her childhood,
and that she will permit him to consider himself
her friend now that she is a handsome and ac-
complished woman."

"Not so bad!" thought Don Giuseppe. "He
must have studied it and learned it by heart. It
certainly is not amiss."

"I shall always be happy to retain Count
Alfredini for a friend," said she, accompanying
the compliment with a graceful smile, which
was, however, both sad and cold. He acknow-
ledged the compliment by a bow. The poor
Count was in ecstasies, but his ecstasies were

those of a child. His gentlemanly salutation was succeeded by an awkward pause, and his vacant air rendered him truly an object of ridicule. Amalia's noble and unaffected manners, her sweet and gentle voice, and, above all, her beauty, had quite disconcerted the Count, who stood in an attitude of astonishment. The favourable impression he had made was in danger of being obliterated, for the silence that followed his compliment was becoming embarrassing, when Don Giuseppe came to the rescue, and roused him from his awkward stupor.

"Your Ladyship is aware," said he, addressing the Marchioness, "that Count Alfredini is one of the strongest pillars of the Church in our poor city, and does great good by his example, by his own works, and by generous contributions."

"I only do that which my inclination and my conscience prompt, without seeking praise," remarked the Count. Praise filled him, though with holy pride.

"Worthy sentiments," remarked Amalia with deference, though without enthusiasm.

"Is your family quite well?" asked the Mar-

chioness, forgetting, with the imbecility of age, that he had been for many years the last of his family.

“Your Ladyship knows very well that I have the misfortune——” here the silly man would have recalled to the memory of the Marchioness that he was left an orphan while quite a child, thus reproaching her with the decay of her faculties; but Don Giuseppe, without allowing him time to finish, said—

“Have you heard the orator, Count, who has been preaching the Novena of the Madonna in the city?”

“Yes, to be sure, and I was delighted. What eloquence! what power! what unction! He seemed capable of moving the stones!”

The preacher, about whom he thus expressed himself, was a friar who spoke habitually with the utmost vehemence, with a voice of most penetrating power, and with extraordinary fluency of expression relative to the Madonna. To her he applied half the Scripture appellations, and robbed the tenderest and most devoted fathers of their most impassioned thoughts suggested by the Virgin, pouring them forth

with an abundance of lamentations, groans, sighs, languishments, transports, and ardent expressions, which might have furnished wares enough for a hundred lovers.

The Marchioness had resumed her state of indifference, Amalia replied—

“I have heard a great deal about this famous orator, and should very much like to hear him preach, but I fear I shall not have the opportunity.”

“If she were my wife we might go together,” thought the Count to himself.

Don Giuseppe thought that it was time to close the interview, for the Count had exhausted all his resources, mental and social.

“I have business in town,” said he, “which obliges me to leave.”

For a moment the Count hesitated whether he should remain or accompany Don Giuseppe; but it was a formidable prospect to be left alone to encounter the stupidity of the old lady, and the good sense of the young one. He had not the tact requisite to talk with the former, nor the talent to sustain a conversation with the latter. He did not confess all this to himself, but within

him lurked a sense of his own deficiency, which unconsciously acted as a check upon his vanity.

"With the permission of the ladies, I will accompany you," said he.

"I hope you will soon favour us again. Your visit will be most acceptable to us," said Amalia, with a graceful smile and an air of courteous indifference, which he mistook for a warm expression of interest.

"I have made an impression upon her," said the poor man to himself, while he answered that with great satisfaction he should take advantage of their kind permission; and he took his leave with Don Giuseppe.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A THIRD LOVER, WHO IS NEITHER ENTHUSIASTIC NOR WICKED.

THE priest and Count set out towards the country, arm-in-arm. For the first time in his life the latter felt a flame in his soul, and his feelings were in a state of agitation. The fire which burned within him was not, however, very intense, nor was his agitation very violent. Both were slight, like a sighing zephyr that is too gentle to move the boughs, but has just strength to agitate the leaves. The emotion that he experienced was equally pleasurable and satisfactory; and the idea of marrying was still more firmly fixed in his mind—a fancy which now took root there for the first time.

“Poor old lady! how much she is aged,” said

the Count, who was deterred by his natural timidity from beginning at once to speak of Amalia; "she certainly cannot live long."

"No, I do not give her longer than until the autumn. The oil is exhausted, the lamp cannot burn much longer; it is gradually dying away." Don Giuseppe would not be the first to enter upon the subject of Amalia, being desirous of exciting the imagination of the Count: at length impatience prevailing over bashfulness, he made an effort to say—

"And the poor girl will then remain alone, without any relative near her. Her position will, indeed, be a melancholy one."

"Indeed it will," returned Don Giuseppe; "that is why I, both as friend and chaplain, and as the only person in the house able to act in the matter, am impatient to see her settled, and with you, Count, too. No alliance could be more suitable, and I am truly desirous of seeing it accomplished."

"Do you think Lady Amalia has a liking for me?—I have for her. I never saw a girl who made so great an impression upon me, and who pleased me so well. And I should say I was

not indifferent to her, she seemed to regard me with some interest."

"Oh, certainly, it appeared so to me," said Don Giuseppe; "she looked at you as I have never seen her look at any one else. A look of sympathy and interest was so plainly perceptible, that it was evident you produced a decided impression upon her."

"Do you think so?" said the Count, rubbing his hands with delighted simplicity.

"Indeed I do: I know Lady Amalia well. She would not have looked at you as she did, had she not been impressed with an involuntary sympathy. It seemed to be the effect of surprise, for had she been aware of it herself, she would have cast down her eyes. She is so modest and good, she is like a Madonna."

These expressions were sweet and soothing to the heart of the Count, and caused him to experience a sensation hitherto unknown. He luxuriated in the combined emotions of love and pride, for his vanity was most agreeably flattered by the priest's remarks.

"The affair is in your hands, then, dear Don Giuseppe," said he; "I give you *carte blanche*.

I shall be obliged, if you will arrange the matrimonial alliance, and pray, lose no time. I am sure I shall be happy with her."

"Leave all to me, and your wishes shall be realized."

Here they separated, to pursue their different courses.

CHAPTER XLIV.

NEW TORTURES INFLICTED ON A VIRGIN
HEART.

THE following morning, after prayers, Mass, and breakfast were over, Don Giuseppe spoke to the Marchioness of the suitability of the match between Lady Amalia and the Count. The Marchioness, notwithstanding the decay of her faculties, perceived, or appeared to perceive, the advantage of the union. It seemed to her a good opportunity of realizing her wish of seeing her granddaughter settled. She had, indeed, a confused and indistinct recollection of a disappointed passion connected with Amalia and Francesco, and it seemed to her that the young man was unworthy and irreligious. But all was vague and indistinct in her mind.

“Don Giuseppe,” she said, “I can no longer think nor act. It is a blessing that Providence has given me you in my last days. You are an angel sent to us to direct the steps of my poor Amalia, and you will, I know, do the best for her.” Affection seemed to revive the powers of the old lady for a brief space. “Do as you please,” continued she; “whatever you do will succeed, and may God reward you.”

Having uttered these words, her mind again became confused, and she sank into her former state of apathy. Thus did Don Giuseppe seek to accomplish a marriage from which he promised himself a rich harvest of vengeance, and perhaps of love.

He decided to take Amalia unawares, and introduce the subject as by pure accident, sounding her feelings before he expressed himself openly. He saw her in the garden, alone as usual, in the state of gentle and thoughtful melancholy, which was now habitual with her. Don Giuseppe approached her unperceived, with his breviary in his hand, pretending to be absorbed in the office. Had the opportunity offered, she would have turned in another direc-

tion ; but it was now too late to avoid meeting him. Don Giuseppe passed near her. She looked down, and walked on, as if unwilling to disturb him. He stopped, signed to her with his hand to do the same, while he continued reading. Having concluded the office, he said the prayers, which are accompanied by signs of the cross, bows, and genuflexions, and at length closed the breviary, and placed it under his arm, and said—

“ I have finished now, let us walk together a while, dear Lady Amalia, and enjoy a little chat.”

“ With pleasure, Don Giuseppe,” said she, smiling faintly and with effort. Without, however, appearing to notice it, he said—

“ How are you, dear Lady Amalia? Is your mind tranquil now?”

Her heart beat, but she answered, “ Yes, Don Giuseppe, I think so,” as if she would willingly persuade herself that such was the case ; but the sad smile that accompanied the answer proved the contrary.

“ You have had recourse to God, and you see he has heard you,” said the hypocrite. “ What

do you think of the Count? Should you have known him again?"

"Oh! no. I had quite forgotten his countenance. His is an insignificant face, that leaves no impression."

"But it is not at all displeasing," said the priest, "and his manners are agreeable."

"That is true," said she, partly because she agreed with him, to some extent, and was unwilling to contradict him; but principally because she did not care to prolong the conversation with regard to a person who was so completely indifferent to her.

"And then," continued he, "the Count has a qualification which is far above all worldly considerations—he is profoundly pious."

"It was on that ground," she replied, "that I had pleasure in seeing him."

"He would make any woman very happy," said Don Giuseppe.

Amalia remained silent, as if it were a matter that did not concern her; but she thought to herself, "he would never make me happy, even if my heart were not inclined towards another—he is too silly."

“ If he met with a pious and devoted woman for a companion, she would find in him the most compliant husband. He would not only permit her to perform works of piety, but would assist her, and they would emulate each other in doing good, and serving God.”

“ Oh, yes,” answered she with cordial sincerity, “ I firmly believe that.”

“ But it is so difficult to meet with a wife of this description ! If he could find such a one, he would be quite disposed to marry.”

“ If it is his desire, God will perhaps place a suitable person in his path, and then he can marry.”

“ It is difficult,” repeated the priest, “ in these degenerate times, to meet with such a person ; but he has seen a person who would suit him exactly, who would, he believes, make him happy, and with whom he could follow the bent of his holy inclinations. He would enter into her views, and aid her in her works of piety.”

“ If he has found such a person,” said Amalia with simplicity, “ he should speak to her. Such a match could not be difficult to arrange.”

"Could not be difficult! Would you see no difficulty, if such a person offered himself?"

"Oh, I do not mean that, Don Giuseppe," said she with some disquietude; but he continued—"if such a person offered himself to you."

"You are joking, Don Giuseppe, and you know I am little disposed for jesting," said she, with a tone combining anger, sorrow, and supplication.

"Indeed I am not joking, but speaking as seriously as possible."

"You know very well that I cannot listen to such conversation," said she, hastily, and half weeping.

"And why not?" said he, with an inflection of voice both severe and solemn: but he softened his tone, and repeated immediately, "Dear Lady Amalia, why not?"

This question agitated her violently. It awoke suddenly in her breast the rebellious passion which, though sleeping for a time, existed still, and existed in full force.

"You ought not to ask me such a question, Don Giuseppe," said the unhappy girl, with a

trembling voice, but still with a certain tone of decision. "You ought not to ask me that question."

"If I do," said he solemnly, "it is for your good, and you ought to be grateful to me. My daughter, I refer to thyself."

Whenever he entered upon subjects of importance with her, he intentionally availed himself of an Italian custom, and in addressing her, used the pronoun thou, to render his discourse more impressive.

"I am well aware that an unfortunate passion still occupies thy heart—"

"But I do my utmost to overcome it," hastily interrupted Amalia. "I commit my heart to God. ' But to conquer it—is beyond my power."

"Because thou deceivest thyself. Thou thinkest that thou art doing thy utmost, but at the same time—I observe thee closely, and can read thy heart—but at the same time thou art nourishing the fatal passion within thee, and in spite of thyself thou art caressing it."

"Oh, no! Don Giuseppe."

"Yes, unhappy girl, yes. Thou seekest

solitude, and why? Thou didst not formerly seek it. Thine eyes are frequently seen red with weeping, the tears hardly dry. This was not the case formerly." Cruel, bad man! You count her steps, you scrutinize her brow to penetrate its thoughts, you surprise her secret tears—the innocent and pure relief of the hapless maiden's heart—the relief in which she indulges in the privacy of her own chamber, in that sanctuary the mysteries of which no man may violate without impiety.

"That bad young man still occupies thy mind," said the priest, "his image is far from horrifying thee, as it ought—the image graven by the tempter on thy heart in characters of fire. Thou art obstinate and impenitent."

"Oh pity! have pity upon me," said the poor girl, supplicating the priest with clasped hands, as if conjuring the genius of evil to depart from her, or as if beseeching the clemency of divinity. "I shall die with terror!"

"May God be gracious to thee. He places before thee a man after his own heart. 'Behold,' he says, 'the support provided for the young and tender vine, to which it may cling with con-

fidence. Abandoned to its own weakness, it is unable to support itself.' But see, thou still inclinest towards this culpable passion with weak mind and vacillating will. God offers thee a support, and thou despisest and rejectest it."

"But I have not rejected it yet, for, Heaven be praised! it has never been offered to me," said she, wiping the cold perspiration from her brow.

"Well," said he resolutely, "the Count is the man whom God has placed in thy path, and now wilt thou refuse him? The Count offers thee his hand!"

"Holy Virgin," she exclaimed with a cry of desperation, "I will not—I cannot love him. I should be hateful to myself!" She insisted with resolute energy, "I can never overcome the thought which is, alas! too firmly rooted in my heart; and if it is wrong now, it would be sinful then, and I cannot help having it."

"I will not ask you to reflect at present," said the priest with a grave and severe air, though not reproachfully, but rather as if offering counsel; "you will think about it, and commit your case to the Lord. Think of the

age of your dear grandmother; she may be taken from you any day, and leave you an orphan, alone in the world. Think of the danger of your passion continuing to increase, until it becomes a blind and frenzied state of desperation. Think that it is a sign of the mercy of God, and that he has not forgotten you; that he presents to you this man, so worthy, rich, religious, and noble, and of whose overtures the most exalted woman might be proud. God presents him to you, and says, 'Behold a man after my own heart; accept him for the companion of thy life.' What will become of you, if you do not accept this offer? You will reflect upon it quietly, and pray earnestly that God may enlighten you—and then you will give me your answer, and we will talk it over again, if you will take the advice of a true and sincere friend."

Amalia made no reply, but remained with her head drooping, her bosom agitated by a tumult of varied and conflicting emotions.


He left her, and slowly walked away.

CHAPTER XLV.

PRIVATE FAMILY CHAPEL.

THE reader is now introduced into a secret chamber, where the maiden has retired to indulge in meditation and fervent prayer. It is the private chapel of the Fossombroni, within the walls of their mansion.

Around is shed the ambrosia of youth and innocence. Every object is arranged with a delicate and severe elegance, equally expressive of refined taste and interesting superstition. Numerous traces abound of a pure, gentle, and enthusiastic mind immersed in prejudices ; prejudices, however, which, entertained in good faith, excite no feeling of disgust, but which, in the passionate expansion and tender ingenuous-



girl's heart, become, although
interesting.

Room is a small altar of
proportions rather
above it is a
Madonna, who seems
with a benignity of ex-
to inspire unbounded confi-
ceive the prayers addressed to her.
The countenance gives ample assurance,
the fervent aspirations of piety will be
directed by her to her holy Son. It is her office
to intercede with Him, nor can He refuse to the
"Mother of God" any favour that she suppli-
cates in behalf of her votaries. Thus do artists,
either through simple æsthetic inspiration, or
through the aberrations of fantastic prejudice
drawn from a religion based upon error—add
strength to error, by means of the lofty concep-
tions of artistic creation.

Rather lower is a tabernacle, representing a
small temple, of circular form, skilfully carved ;
the cupola is light and elegant, the small co-
lumns surrounding it, most graceful. Its gilded
door is chiselled with amazing art and beauty,

inflamed by pious fervour, have
v thousand times. For several
s of successive generations of the
ladies had pressed this pious me-
Now, for four months, it had been the
nt of the ardent salutes of the gentle
aden.

to represent a sacred legend of a saint undergoing penitence, as on the shields of ancient warriors were carved the deeds of heroes. Within this elegant cabinet is a ponderously massive gold monstrance of exquisite workmanship standing upon a pedestal, and surmounted by a circlet of gilded rays, in the middle of which is a small object, resembling a fly, upon a white field. This is a fragment of the dress of the Madonna, and to it is attached a patent of authenticity, which is very likely contradicted by the material itself. If of silk—which in those early times was only used for the precious attire of kings—it would need a great stretch of imagination and faith to believe it ever belonged to the humble Mother of Christ. The priest alone can open the cabinet to expose the relic to admiration on the solemn festive days of the Madonna. To all the feasts of the Virgin this fragment is applicable.

Upon the steps in front of the table are silver candlesticks of the finest workmanship, intermixed with graceful palms; a cross in the middle; a *prie-dieu* in front, with a Crucifix above it, exhibiting at its foot the impression of

the lips which, inflamed by pious fervour, have saluted it so many thousand times. For several centuries the lips of successive generations of the Fossombroni ladies had pressed this pious memorial. Now, for four months, it had been the recipient of the ardent salutes of the gentle maiden.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A PICTURE SPEAKS.

IN the sacred retreat, where fragrance is exhaled by choice flowers, gathered and renewed day by day, where devotion and profound humiliation are united to superstition and weakness, kneels Amalia engrossed in fervent prayer, while the rest of the household have retired to their chambers, the night being already far advanced. Her prayer is more fervent than usual. An emotion, not alone the offspring of devout aspirations, is apparent in her countenance. Her eyes, from grief of heart, drop silent tears. Her respiration is troubled, and her words are broken by ill-repressed, but subdued sobs. In low tones and soft sounds, she addresses a prayer to the Virgin. To the maiden it seems that the

Virgin regards her with benign look and gentle smile. She believes in the look and smile, and derives consolation from them.

“Oh, Holy Mother!” she says, “behold me, a sinner, prostrate before thee, Mother of Mercy. I feel a profane affection in my heart—oh, check it! I love one who loves not thee; who addresses not to thee his prayers, who knows thee not; and I love him better than thee. If this unhappy affection is a temptation of the Evil One, oh, give me strength to root it up, for I try in vain, night and day. Oh, inspire me with the resolution I want, and if I cannot overcome the wicked passion, let me die. But oh, most blessed Virgin! soften my heart, that I may not die unrepentant and be lost for ever.” At these words a frightful tremor pervaded her whole frame. “I know that my obstinacy in this unhappy love is the work of Satan, and I would overcome it. I declare before thee, that I *do* desire to overcome it—I am willing to die in the struggle.” These words were uttered with heart-rending sobs. “But if for the good of my soul, and to please my divine master, Jesus Christ, I must accept the man whom I cannot

love, but who is pious and holy, I will make the sacrifice for the sake of my heavenly bridegroom—I will bind myself to the man that I do not love.” The pallor of death overspread her face, and an indescribable sensation of suffering attacked her heart. Suddenly a new idea seemed to occur to her, and a smile sad, yet bespeaking hope, settled on her lip. With almost convulsive excitement she continued—“Oh, thanks, Holy Mother—thanks!—Thou speakest to me—thou addressest me with sweet words of consolation—thanks! Thou inspirest me with a holy thought—a thought of comfort.” To her agitated mind, it seemed that the lips of the picture moved. She seemed to hear the consoling words, “Enter the convent! There thou wilt find peace and salvation.”

“Yes,” she continued, “thou inspirest me with a holy resolution. I renounce the vanities of this life. I will become the Bride of the celestial Bridegroom. To Him I will devote myself; I will conquer my earthly, sinful love, and will be faithful to Him. I will be His bride, and will become a nun.”

In this consoling resolution she experienced

so much peace, that it seemed to her at that moment that she really had strength to overcome her earthly love. For a time she remained silent, abandoning herself to profound meditation.

CHAPTER XLVII.


MARVELLOUS STRATEGICAL MOVEMENT.

WHO is this that so boldly violates the sanctity of private prayer?—Who enters the sacred precincts of that chamber, which should be inviolate at that hour, and when a pious soul is labouring under mortal agony, and uttering lamentations intended for no ear but that of God?—Who is that profane man who is so fixedly regarding the unconscious girl?—Who with greedy ear drinks in the petitions uttered by her?—It is her untiring persecutor, Don Giuseppe, who dares thus to penetrate the mysteries of that heart, and become the witness of her secret supplications.

He had knocked gently, but Amalia had been

too absorbed to hear him. He opened the door so softly, as to be unperceived by her, the sound being deadened by an inner door. This inner door was glazed, and seeing her engaged in her devotions, he opened it slightly, and could thus hear the words she uttered. His eye was fixed upon her with the utmost intensity, and with an expression of malignity. When her prayer was concluded, he retired, closing the door softly. Like the midnight murderer, he hides himself, that he may consummate his crime the more securely by attacking his victim unprepared.

He knocked at the door, as if he had but just arrived. Amalia heard the sound and was at first alarmed, but quickly recovering herself, she invited the person who knocked to enter. She saw the black figure of Don Giuseppe before her. Had a hissing serpent suddenly met her gaze, poised erect, with glaring eye and tongue in rapid motion, it could not have occasioned her an equal amount of horror and repugnance, as when the designing priest appeared before her. She shuddered involuntarily, and her heart's blood seemed frozen. She would have exorcised the demon, had she known the magic



CHAP^r

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 er again
 claring that
 a man, than a
 herself. "He is a
 MARVELLOUS & is Satan who inspires
 against one who seeks
 WHO is this t' could lead you into the path
 of private pr Thus did her conscience revolt
 cincts of th impulse. Remorse seized her,
 at that ho need to repair her injustice by an
 under r of deference and docility, in exact
 intend to the repugnance she felt. Her
 that of natural aversion and her efforts to
 the & were but the work of a single mo-
 d- will the priest read her feelings and smiled
 a sinister smile. With a gentle look, how-
 he gazed at her earnestly, as the serpent
 to charm the innocent bird, that it may the
 easily approach it to lacerate it with its
 venomous fang.

"Am I too bold, Lady Amalia, in presenting myself before you at this late hour?"

"No, Don Giuseppe, I am sure you have some good reason to induce you to do so," replied she, forcing herself to answer him graciously.

"A reason of the utmost importance to your welfare—nothing else would justify it. I am uneasy about you. I cannot rest until I feel assured of your safety."

"I know how good you are, Don Giuseppe, and I thank you. But do you think that my soul is in peril?"

"It would be in peril," answered he, wilyly, "if you were less good and religious: but I hope yet to be able to save you, with the grace of God, and by his will, because I know, pious as you are, you will overcome temptation. When man is resolute, God helps him with his grace, which never fails, and he triumphs."

"Oh, yes, Don Giuseppe," she answered, and in her eye beamed a ray of comfort. "God helps those who trust in him. I have prayed to him and to his holy Mother, and I have found consolation. They have inspired me with

strength to conquer an evil passion. The blessed Virgin herself has spoken to me ; I saw those lips move with my own eyes," said she, pointing to the picture of the Madonna ; " she uttered words of consolation, and offered me most salutary counsel. She said, ' Enter the convent ; there thou wilt find peace and salvation.' My grandmother, alas ! has not long to live, and when she is gone to Paradise, I am quite prepared to retire to the convent, which was my original vocation."

The priest had no wish that she should enter a convent, and be thus lost to him. Her sweet smile would be for ever hidden from his gaze ; her graceful form would no longer meet his longing eye, her voice would never again penetrate his ear with its sweet but fatal sounds. Though his love was unreturned, he could not endure the thought of never again seating himself by her side ; never again feeling the light touch of her dress, which now and then in her guileless inadvertence swept over his cassock.

Were she to enter a convent, the confidential intercourse of domestic life, and the familiar proximity which was now inevitable, could never

again be enjoyed.' Never more would be discovered to his glance the graceful charms which now constantly met his eye ; but, above all, in her unhappy love, he could no longer interfere to satisfy his untiring vengeance, and revel in the execrable delight of tormenting her timid and innocent bosom. He was quite resolved, then, that she should not embrace convent life ; he solemnly pledged himself to prevent it, and he now addressed her to that effect.

“ The convent is a place of sanctification and salvation, it is true ; it is a place where a justified soul can progress in piety and render itself daily more acceptable to God ; where a pure mind can attain to angelic perfection which, elsewhere, it is not given to mortals to reach. But it is necessary that this soul be worthy to become the spouse of Christ, that it be not contaminated with worldly affections. The offering must be without spot. And are you thus pure ? —Would your offering be stainless ?—Dare you venture to consecrate yourself to God, before extirpating your profane and unhappy passion from your heart ?—Are you worthy to call yourself the sister of those holy virgins who, in in-

nocence of heart, devote themselves to God?—Can you uproot your fatal love?—Can you forget the impious young man who has bewitched you with his sorcery?—If you can, all well and good—become a nun; the sacrifice of yourself will be accepted of God, and you will be received at the nuptial banquet, and can taste the delight of calling yourself his bride; but otherwise, you would be an unfaithful spouse, a bride unworthy of him. To become a nun would be to commit sacrilege. The suggestion you fancied you heard uttered by the lips of the Virgin was nothing more than delusion. It was not, in reality, a counsel from on high, but was, let me tell you frankly, an illusion contrived by the enemy.”

The unhappy Amalia turned pale and felt her strength fail her, so that she was obliged to lean upon a seat for support, or she would have fallen to the earth.

“Do not alarm yourself, my dear,” said the priest, softly; but his heart was unmoved, and he continued his insidious discourse. “Yes, you must make every effort to overcome the passion. You are a Christian, you are good:

the remedy is simple enough, if you will only accept the proposition made to you. Your only chance of safety depends on marrying the Count."

"Oh, no."

"Yes; on marrying the Count, otherwise you are certainly lost. I will paint you a faithful picture of your future life. You will soon be alone in the world. You will lose your grandmother, and with her you will also lose my counsel and the eye of a sincere friend, who watches over your salvation. We cannot live together, it is very certain, under the same roof. Snares will be spread around you, nor will you know how to escape them. That wicked young man will surround you with his infernal impious arts. You will meet with him; he will murmur insidious words in your ear; the genius of evil will inspire him with eloquence to bewitch and seduce you; you will yield, and will become his. You will look with loving eyes upon that face which seems to you the face of an angel, but is too surely the face of a demon."

"Oh, spare me! spare me!" cried the poor girl, in a state of desperation, prostrating herself

before him, as if he were the majesty of heaven passing final sentence upon man.

“And this man,” he continued, “will clasp you in his arms, will bestow upon you kisses of love—he has done so already—you will be the victim devoted to a condemned spirit, to be condemned with him. You are determined to unite yourself to him: do so, it is a monstrous union—do so; demons will rejoice with ferocious gladness. Think about it to-night. You have yet time to choose between the Count, an angel, and Fantoni, a demon.”

Don Giuseppe quitted her, leaving her a prey to the most frightful agony of mind. He left her alone—at night—after having thus purposely excited her terrors. What diabolical art was this !

CHAPTER XLVIII.

NIGHT IS PEOPLED BY MYSTERIOUS BEINGS.

DAY is governed by the spirit of life. Everything appears in vivid and varied colouring, tinged with the rich light shed from heaven. Beings animate and inanimate display, under the influence of the great orb of day, all the energy of life, and the soul of the joyful exults, and the soul of the suffering takes comfort.

Night is governed by the spirit of shadows. Night has its own life, its own beings, its own agitations, its own activity; but it belongs to a hidden and mysterious world—the world of phantasms. The beings, which move and act in the day, lie in repose at night, inert and entranced. Physical nature is wrapped in darkness; a black mantle envelopes everything, confounding and

obscuring all. Nature retires within herself, and shrinks into a state of torpor. Meanwhile spring up, from the region of shadows, mysterious beings lacking corporeal existence, though assuming the appearance of it, forms solemn or fantastic, gentle spirits, sylphs and shapes of light, or evil genii, monsters, and horrid apparitions. To the innocent child slight images of the world of fancy present themselves. To the hopeful and daring boy, an orderly succession of beings and things born of his daily fancyings, all pointing to the future, and dressed in gay and changing colours—quickly to fade in the sombre tints of reality, and leave him only sad recollections of the past. Forms of goddesses and heroes greet the eye of youths and maidens. To the virtuous man, composed shadows, smiling with heaven's own serenity. To the wicked, ambitious, covetous, profligate man, dire aspects of monsters and malignant spirits rise from the depths of the realms of desolation and mourning.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MEMORABLE EFFECTS OF A PRIESTLY ARTIFICE.

A SWEET maiden, pure of heart, of sinless life, and angelic beauty, lies sleeping, the soporific influence of night diffused throughout her system. The forms and reflections presenting themselves to her must surely be laughing and gay, or sweet and soothing. Celestial visitants surely group around her, claiming her pure spirit as one of themselves. But see! the genial quiet of the air is troubled by an unclean spirit, which oppresses her, weighing on her gentle breast like an incubus. The serene light of the stars gives place to the noxious glare of a diabolical eye; a noisome exhalation in the place contaminates the air perfumed by the breath of her chaste bosom.

Sleep on, gentle girl! Fear not evil! Thou art innocent in the sight of thy Maker. Sleep on, and forget for a while the infamous arts of the tempter, who, though unable to corrupt thy heart, has succeeded in embittering the springs of thy life, playing with atrocious blasphemy upon thy piety, falsifying it to thine eye, only to torment thee.

After the impression produced upon her by Don Giuseppe, Amalia retired to rest, a prey to overwhelming torments, and she tried to close her eyes in sleep. Long time she courted slumber before it came to yield her refreshment. At length, after protracted watching, in a state of mind which it is impossible to describe, but which may be imagined as the effects of the scene we have witnessed, she slept. Weariness overcame excitement, and oblivion resoued her from her struggles with reality.

She sleeps. Immaterial shades bearing the appearance of physical forms present themselves to her. The place is undecided—full of undetermined, inexplicable splendours. Now, it seems one of nature's blessed and tranquil hiding

places, with plants of fantastic growth, trees and turfey pathways—but all shadowy and uncertain. Now the place seems an ample hall glistening with splendour—majestic columns, gold and purple, all blend into a form resembling a tribunal. The light is hazy, though vivid—now an emanation from the stars of pure and glittering resplendency, now it seems the fitful and terrible light of an incendiary. At one moment the place assumes the appearance of a forest, at another of a spacious hall, but is always terrific in its splendour.

Her soul is excited by a delirious and furious gaiety. Francesco stands near her in the attitude of love. He looks at her fixedly, and she returns his gaze. The sweet words of enchantment fall blissfully on her ear, but seem to inflict torture on her heart—still she luxuriates in them. He smiles upon her with the gentlest of smiles—she reciprocates it: but the smile in its sweetness descends into her heart like a fatal flash from the bottomless abyss, and seems to her a combination of ineffable sweetness with inexpressible love. As he stands before her,

she is enchanted with love—yet she trembles with fear. He takes her hand. Oh ! it scorches hers ! his passionate lip is pressed to hers—and burns it ! She fixes her eye glowing with love upon his—his emits flames of devouring fire. Horrible ! terrific ! In an ecstasy of delight and desperation, with delirious frenzy, she feels urged to yield to his embrace ; but his hand changes its form—it grows long—the fingers become claws, and the talons of a demon grasp her. His lips are parched and fiery—they are live coals consuming hers—the fixed glance of love changes—his eye becomes gory red. The mien of her lover is changed. His form evaporates, and the angelic is confounded with the monstrous—all is black, or livid flame. Two horns, entwined the one in the other, rise from his head. His feet are visibly armed with claws, like his hands. With loud cries she endeavours to escape from him—but the monster enfolds her in his embrace, and drags her round and round. A sudden burst of fiendish laughter echoes through the air. Horrid faces look upon her and assail her with loud and execrable

revilings, and writhe themselves about her in horrid gyrations. She feels herself contaminated by the unclean spirit, whose embraces she cannot flee, and who drags her along at his will. Horror-stricken, she utters a cry, starts up in her bed, and awakes from her terrible sleep.

It would be impossible to describe the agitation, affright, and terror, of the wretched girl. She would have cried aloud to summon help, but her strength failed ; and when fully restored to consciousness, she felt ashamed to do so. Kneeling upon the bed, she prayed during the rest of that long night. She prayed fervently with feverish eagerness, and she prayed incessantly for hours.

At length the light of morning broke. She rose, and sent in haste for Don Giuseppe. He was already prepared to attend her summons, for he was expecting it. With a smile of mockery truly infernal, he hastened to her, unwilling to lose time ; for he well knew that, with the day-light, the fancies of the night would disappear.

After half an hour's conference with her, he left her room, his countenance flushed with triumph. He had succeeded. Amalia had promised, and in a few days would be the Countess Alfredini.

CHAPTER L.


UNIVERSITY LIFE.

WE would intreat the reader to accompany us to the city of Padua ; place, a Restaurant ; scene, a large hall, along the whole length of which tables are disposed. A great number of students of the University are assembled and grouped together in various parties. The hour is five o'clock in the afternoon. The lectures for the day being over, the students meet by hundreds in the much-frequented dining rooms of Zangiacomi, in a retired street leading to the *Piazza dei Signori*. The rooms are large, and filled with the gay young men. We will enter the largest, in which there are about a hundred of them distributed at different tables in groups of six or eight ; and in each group a special topic

of conversation is carried on. The different knots manifest variety of appearance and diversity of character, according to the division or party to which they belong, each individual associating with the one most congenial to his tastes, habits, and age. It is dinner-time ; the hour for gay chat, for noisy talk, for revel and brag ;—or for sensible and reasonable conversation. Those who are the most noisy and uproarious, are principally the *matricolini*, or students whose first year it is at the University. The more sedate and silent are the older students, who have been there four or five years, and who, having passed through all the grades of dissipation and unrestrained licence, are satiated, and have become steady. Groups of youths from eighteen to twenty, with dissolute air, impudent expression of countenance, and faces pale from continual excess, are loud in oaths, and boastful of licentiousness. They amuse each other with anecdotes of doubtful authenticity, about encounters with soldiers and police. Scarcely a year ago these young men were shut up in a college, and condemned to restraint almost monastic, under the direction of Jesuits, or at least semi-Jesuits.

Forced to submit to all the rigour and minute religious observances imposed upon them, they had to attend weekly confessions, orations, daily meditations, intermediate morning and evening prayers, and to listen to admonitions, jealously and sternly inflicted; so that their state was one of slavery. To these numberless superstitions they submitted without any devotional feeling; for, though their prayers were the object of their detestation, to neglect them was impossible. Escaped from this confinement, they are now unfettered, at liberty to revel in the freedom of university life. Some of them still retain the conventual air of embarrassment—that awkwardness which indicates inexperience of the world and of life; but filled with passionate excitement, they are ashamed as they reflect upon the restraints to which they have been subjected under priestly regimen. The reaction has followed; and now they go to the other extreme, and indulge in play, debauchery, and idleness. Such are a great part of those who enter the University. A year's experience renders them more discreet and moderate.

A second group of undergraduates consists of



sober, studious and steady youths, who, with the utmost seriousness, cleverly converse on intellectual subjects, losing sight of the material world.

A third *coterie* is formed of bold and daring young men, of portly bearing, square shoulders, strong, muscular arms, and indomitable courage. These come in frequent contact with the police, of whom they are the terror, and from whose formidable *batons* their heads and shoulders receive frequent blows. Their manner of speaking is deliberate and dignified—their eyes placid rather than menacing; they seem slow to wrath and tardy of speech—but they are quick of hand. These are the heroes of the University, and the others regard them with a reverential homage. Strange adventures and deeds of prowess are related of them.

Another society is formed of the gamblers and spendthrifts. It is the commencement of the month, and they can afford to live at the tavern. A week later, having spent their money, they will be reduced to bread and water. They will also be so divested of external glories as to wear a simple holland jacket and trowsers, and per-

haps no shirt ; but they are gay, and send care to the winds. They are clever enough to extract money from their tender mothers by feigned illness, pretended expenses for books, or imaginary accidents. Those who have no families from whom to draw money, or have families who have no money for them to draw ; do as well as they can, and submit bravely to every kind of privation for three weeks out of the four. Some of these have been at the University six, eight, or ten years, and have not yet passed their examination. Their countenances indicate sullen carelessness and apathy—though not unmixed with manly qualities, and just blended with a shade of magnanimity. Perhaps under wise regulations and national liberal government, they might have become great or worthy men.

A fifth group is formed of young men of noble bearing, who seem what they are—possessors of real scholarship and intelligence. They are indulgent to the errors of the rest, without having been in the slightest degree led away themselves. These are a knot of the choice spirits of the University. They are known in general by their sparkling eyes, long black beards,

noble aspect, slight form, and discourse pleasing and instructive. Around their table a different air seems to be breathed, purer and more ennobling ; and a certain involuntary respect seems paid to them by the others. Some even of the otherwise unscrupulous are careful to avoid, in their presence, the indulgence of unbecoming language.

In the midst, indeed, of the prevailing mirth and dissipation, and notwithstanding all juvenile errors, gleams of generosity and frankness may be observed by a reflecting spectator, and incline him to indulgence towards them. The conversation touches on the fair sex, politics, and literature. Serious and light topics, noble and degrading sentiments, are here uttered and discussed. The professors, with their vices and virtues, are criticized. Of some, the voice, gesture, and words are subject of mimicry. Tales are told of others, how, under the intimidation of threats or blows, or show of pistol, they have been induced to give testimonials of good conduct and scholarly progress to some of the most dissipated students, totally ignorant of the acquirements which they have nominally studied ;

tales of enforced fasts—the body suffering from the debilitated state of the purse. In short, all topics of every description are here discussed.

Police are vigilant, and spies are numerous, introducing themselves everywhere else ; some with bold air, large moustaches, long beard, and ferocious look ; others, with soft manners and gentle speech ; others, again, immovable, who, without appearing to look or listen, see and hear all, and insidiously introduce themselves under the guise of friends and admirers !—Tyranny is really Protean in its spies. But here are no spies, nor is any fear of them experienced. Youth may be licentious, irreligious, and given to play—but it is the age of generosity and sincerity, and here, in an assembly of a hundred, all express themselves with perfect freedom and security—for all are students.

CHAPTER LI.

A DISCUSSION THAT IS NOT SCIENTIFIC.

AMIDST these varieties of noble and ignoble thoughts, of sedate and profound conversation, proceeding at the various tables, the plates are borne hither and thither with marvellous dexterity and precision by the waiter. He carries them twenty or thirty at once, distributes them, receives fresh orders, takes the money, and returns to the kitchen to renew the same operation over and over again, and all with the utmost rapidity.

We have already named one table at which is assembled a party of young men, students, whose deportment is dignified and serious, who all appear rather disposed to maintain their gravity and decorum, than to indulge in the riot and

dissipation of the others. Their appearance is marked by the composed and intellectual expression of men who encourage noble thoughts, and indulge not in dissipating pleasures that mar and debase the lines of the face. At this table the following colloquy took place.

"I cannot understand," said Riporti, the oldest and most profusely bearded of the company, "why Fantoni so rarely comes amongst us now. He is such charming company. What can be the reason of it?"

"I do not know indeed," said Palladi ; "when I meet him at Bò,* he speaks to me, it is true, in his usual friendly manner, but instead of conversing, as he used to do on all occasions, he seems anxious to hurry away and remain alone."

"He must have something on his mind to disturb him," remarked a third, named Orsi. "He is completely changed since Easter. He takes his dinner alone, for, of course, as he does not come with us, he does not dine with any

* The University of Padua is called in the vernacular, Bò.

one. In the evening you never see him at the café, where he used to meet us to go to the theatre, and indeed he never goes to the theatre now. His face is long and serious, and he looks as if he were suffering from grief. No family troubles can have happened, or he would have told us. Study might render him serious and thoughtful, but not so reserved."

"Perhaps he is in love," suggested Riporti, "and that may make him reserved. Love is like wine. It has different effects on individuals, according to their dispositions. Some become light-hearted and cheerful under its influence, some impetuous, some violent, some meek and affectionate to all, some reserved and taciturn. He may be in love. He did not appear a little while ago to care for any one, but now, the tender passion may have seized him, and it may be love which renders him so quiet and reserved, and induces him to live so completely by himself."

"I am not of your opinion," answered Palladi. "To say that love can so have changed him, is an injustice to his sterling character. Does not love always instil additional gentleness

into a gentle bosom? Does love ever cool the holy flame of friendship? When we love, nature smiles upon us with her most bewitching smile. Everything wears to our eye a more pleasing aspect, and the other affections of life reflect the joys of love, and are all enhanced by it. The friend, to whom we can pour out our heart's-theme, becomes doubly dear. If Francesco were in love, he would certainly not come among us the less on that account, nor would he be less affectionate with us than he used to be."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Riporti, who had no great share of sentimentalism. "You grow quite romantic. Well, though I have no romance in my composition, I cannot help appreciating your sentiments, and agreeing with them. But if it is not a happy and smooth love—which I am now inclined to believe it is not—it must be an unfortunate, hopeless love, which makes him so retiring."

"Well, it may be so," said Orsi, "but it would be a strange thing if, so early in life, he had a bitter tale to tell about love, like a modern novel writer. A very few months ago, he cer-

tainly gave no signs of being under its influence. It does not seem possible to me that he can have conceived a passion to render him so unhappy. Here the students have no choice. They are watched too strictly by the citizens to have any opportunity, and, if by chance they go to a house, the girls are too prosy, and have too little sentiment in their composition—and without that, I am sure, Francesco is not very likely to fall in love. Nor could the few days that he spent at home at Easter have produced such consequences. I do not mean that he had not time to fall in love, for that is a very sudden operation ; but there was no time to account for his present state of melancholy, and consequent retirement and reserve.”

“ I do not believe, for my part,” replied Palladi, “ that he has any cause for grief, because, although he is solitary and reserved, still he does not seem at all low-spirited. Nor are there any signs of grief in his face, which must inevitably be the case, with his impressionable nature, if he were suffering from disappointed love. He seems to me thoughtful, rather than unhappy.”

“ Well, time will explain all,” exclaimed Ripperti, who did not like the trouble of reflecting, either about his own concerns or his neighbours. The rest of the students assented, some to the one view of the case, some to the other, and the conversation turned into a new channel.

The observation that Francesco manifested none of the signs that hopeless love occasions in an impassioned heart, was perfectly just. He knew that he was beloved, and luxuriated in the assurance ; nor did he entertain the slightest suspicion of Amalia’s marrying any one else.

CHAPTER LII.

THE EXPIRING FLAME OF LOVE SHEDS ITS LAST
BRILLIANT RAY.

A FEW hours after the colloquy between the young friends of Francesco in the dining-room of Zangiacomi, he was differently occupied in a distant part of the city. Alone, he walked round the walls, musing upon his love. He scarcely knew whether to consider himself a fortunate or an unfortunate lover. He seemed to himself to be both the one and the other. But is it right to say he seemed equally the one and the other? No. He was a happy lover,—happy beyond measure, because he possessed a precious heart which, he felt assured, would ever remain faithful to him. He felt himself blessed. True, a light shade of sadness would ever and

anon traverse his mind, but it was but a passing shadow.

“She loves me, and I am blessed,” he said to himself. “The height of grief it would be,—worse, infinitely worse than death—if she did not love me, or if she were fickle, but that I cannot fear. As certain as I am of my own existence—of my love, which here, within me, I feel—so certain am I that she will never think of another than the friend of her childhood, and if that be the case, all the rest is of little importance: I will overcome all.”

“But I possess her love! Yes, I am secure of her love,” repeats his soul with delight; “I feel an ineffable transport pervade my heart. A sweetness that is totally unlike aught else inundates my soul, and I know that this sweetness is tasted by her. Oh, delight! to be beloved by her, an angel of Paradise! Yes, she loves me; she, the most beautiful, the dearest, the tenderest of women! All my delight is in thinking of her; but she, too, thinks of me, and with the same emotion. I feel that she thinks of me, and that her heart bounds towards me with the impulse of love. I feel the same sensation


that she feels, the same transport of tenderness, the same pulsation, the same fusion of spirit that she experiences. I dwell in that world of hidden and mysterious existence generated in the heart by love. I feel my love, not only in my own heart—but I feel it doubly with her feelings, her sense of beatitude. I am happy with a double felicity—hers and mine. Yes, yes, the happiness of my heart is, indeed, twofold. I feel the intensity of the felicity of both my own heart and hers—and truly it is a double felicity.”

The hour, the place, his sensations, all tending to excite his mind—he fixed his eye on the brightest star of the firmament, which vividly shone in all its splendour. It seemed to him that in the silence of the heavens a secret understanding existed between them, and that the gentle ray, shining thence, was shed by reflection, first throbbing within the bosom of the genial star, under the influence of a love-look from her. A mutual exchange of enraptured fancies seemed to the excited lover to pass between her heart and his, through the medium of the heavens. She, he fully believed, identi-

fied with his being, was, like himself, indulging in blissful solitude, respiring the evening breeze, which, with fervid transport, commended the gentle sighs of her virgin bosom to the wings of the zephyrs, to be borne away to her absent lover.


Absorbed in such sweet reflections, the rays of the star appeared to him an emanation of her smile, gladdened by her loving eye. In ineffable ecstasy he exclaimed, "Thou speakest to me, I answer to thee. I feel that at this moment thou art thinking of me, while I am thinking of thee." It might be so, but, alas! with what diversity of sentiment! If the Countess Alfredini thought of Francesco—it was only to force herself to banish him from her mind.

The charming images gradually fade from his mind and give place to agitating terrors. The star, just now so clear and bright, seems to him tinged with red. The beautiful blue of the heavens seems changed to a sombre tint. The night air, instead of relieving his breast, seems to oppress it. He thinks he hears the ominous sounds of nocturnal birds, and joy is changed to



grief and anguish. The smile of hope is succeeded by agitation and misgivings. He turns his steps homewards, far otherwise than cheerful and happy, as when he set out. His step is slow. He dares no longer raise his eyes to the starlit sky. He would persuade himself that he is happy ; but his heart speaks another language, inexplicable and awe-inspiring—nor can he tell whether it is suggested by the spirit of truth or falsehood. It speaks with a voice which fills him with a vague sensation of trouble and grief, —a voice which seems to say, “Deceive not yourself with hopes of felicity. Think not that the immense unbounded joy that you promise yourself is for you—it is not. Illusive, fallacious, deceptive, were your visions of ineffable delight.”

In such sad self-communings he goes towards the house. Is the voice real and infallible, which warns us of evil about to overtake us ? Is it unerring, like the voice of instinct, which warns unreasoning creatures of the coming tempest ? Be it so or not, certain it is that after indulging in the brightest



visions of love, Francesco retired to his abode melancholy and sad, unable to account for the change. There was reason enough for it, however.

CHAPTER LIII.

JESTING LETTER, WHICH BURNS IN THE HANDS
OF THE READER.

HE entered the house where he lodged about eleven o'clock. The servant who admitted him gave him a light, and he retired to his study, an indefinable sense of sadness lurking at his heart. He tried to chase it away, feeling angry with himself for indulging it causelessly. He was about to seat himself at the table, with the intention of beginning to study. On approaching the table, he saw there a letter bearing a post mark. It was no welcome sight, for in his present mood he regarded it as the messenger of evil. With a feeling of repugnance he extended his hand to take it, and glancing at the direction, he saw it was from a young fellow-student

from his own neighbourhood, who, on account of his health, had been at home for a fortnight, his illness, though slight, having sufficed to obtain for him leave of absence. Francesco, seeing that the address of the letter was from this young man, with whom he was intimate, though not on terms of confidence, felt his fears tranquillized. "How stupid," said he, "to frighten myself at the sight of a letter, as if I never received one." He opened it boldly, though his confidence seemed forced. It was but a short letter, and he read :

"DEAR FRIEND,

"My native air has been very beneficial to me, and the attentions of my family have succeeded so well, that they have quite set me up. I am getting tired of this stupid place, and long to get back to dear Padua and my old friends. I know the fair ones are sighing for my return as much as I am to see them. I have a brunette who is dying with impatience to see me, I'll wager ; a blonde, whose tender heart is sadly grieved by my illness ; a pale charmer, whose pallor will be greatly increased,

I am certain, by anxiety on my account, and many others besides, who are longing for me back. Dear little creatures ! I will soon fly to console them and myself too. Sha'n't I be interesting with the sentimental air of an invalid ?

“ Meanwhile I beg of you, dear Francesco, to inform the Professors, that I shall be at Padua in two or three days. Hoping to soon see you,

“ I am, my dear fellow,

“ Yours, &c,

“ P.S.—I do not know whether you have seen the young Marchioness of Fossombroni since her return from the convent ; she is grown a splendid girl, a thorough angel ! I declare I should go wild after her, if she were free ; but, to the surprise of everybody, she is married to-day to that simpleton, Count Alfredini. It is a most hasty affair, and has taken place at the country house. I am mad to think of such a jewel falling into the hands of that ass.”

CHAPTER LIV.

THE EMBRACE OF DEATH IS THE EMBRACE OF
A FAITHFUL FRIEND.

SUCH was the postscript, but the troubled eye of the miserable young man refused to grasp it all. He exhibited no signs of emotion; his lip did not quiver; not a cry escaped him, nor did he tremble visibly—his sufferings were too intense. Instantly his face assumed the rigidity of stone, the pallor of death. His hands turned cold, and clutched the fatal letter as if benumbed; his glaring eyes were fixed upon it, but without seeing its contents. His form was stiff, but showed no signs of weakness, and seemed to lengthen and distend itself to a gaunt aspect belonging not to this world. His fixed pupils lost all power of vision, and showed no signs of intelligence. From their glassy glare reason seemed to have fled. Is the man insane, irrecoverably insane? Will his grief instantly terminate fatally, in death? Will he be in a

few moments a lifeless form, his heart for ever at rest from the anguish of life ? It seemed as if such would be the case. So he believed it would be. It was not grief that he felt—it was more than grief—grief did not oppress his heart—it was death that he felt. Death was waiting to embrace him, and he felt it an unutterable consolation to return the embrace,—a consolation, perhaps, not inferior to that of reciprocating *her* embrace,—the embrace of the too fatal charmer. He did not feel miserable at that moment, he rather felt tranquil, almost joyful—but with the joy of the tomb. He was insensible to the blow which had fallen upon him, because the remedy seemed about to follow so quickly—the remedy of death. With delight he thought that soon he should be a corpse, celebrating his nuptial banquet among bones and skulls, with spectres and shades for his guests, amid the tombs of those who had lived, himself now one of them. “He fell as falls a lifeless body !”

END OF VOL. I.

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